

Courier Correo Courier

October 2015
Volume 30, Number 4



**Mennonite
World Conference**
A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**
Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d'Églises Anabaptistes

Pennsylvania 2015 Assembly Overview



Pennsylvania
2015

walking with God
caminemos con Dios
en marche avec Dieu

Mennonite World Conference Assembly 16

For the sixteenth time over nearly a century, the body of Christ from Mennonite and Brethren churches gathered 21-26 July 2015. Over these days spent together at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, 8,454 members of Anabaptist churches from 77 countries worshipped through song, listened to sermons, prayed, attended workshops, worked on service projects and shared meals—together.

Opening the event, representatives of the local indigenous community drummed, prayed and told their stories. “What happened in the past is the past,” said Barry Lee of the Munsee Nation. “Let’s move forward from this day—together—in peace.” Richard Thomas, chair of national advisory council for Pennsylvania 2015 (PA 2015), shared about asking for forgiveness for “Mennonite’s complicity and our lack of concern for justice that deprived Native American brothers and sisters of their land and their way of life.”

PA 2015 provided opportunity for unofficial and official groups of Mennonite World Conference to meet.

Before Assembly Gathered, 449 young Anabaptists (ages 18+) participated in the third Global Youth Summit (GYS). Bookending Assembly Gathered, several PA 2015 attendees continued in fellowship with Assembly Scattered, tour events among MWC-connected churches across the United States.

The MWC Global Education Conference brought educators and administrators from Christian elementary and high schools under the theme “like a tree planted,” while the Global Mission Fellowship and Global Anabaptist Service Network brought together leaders from international agencies.

Health care professionals met, business people talked about faith and commerce, and research associates and church leaders explored the results of the Global Anabaptist Profile project.

The international gatherings of the Mennonite Brethren and Brethren in Christ global church bodies included their annual meetings after Assembly.

The next assembly will be in Indonesia in 2021.

The family together and apart



North American Mennonites keenly interested in genealogy and family names love to play “the Mennonite game” by asking new acquaintances, “Do you know...?” until they find a relative in common.

But as Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from 77 countries gathered in Pennsylvania 21-26 July 2015 to celebrate “walking with God” at Mennonite World Conference’s once-every-six year assembly, the Mennonite game wasn’t only about bloodlines. From all corners of the globe, it didn’t take long before we could find a connection: Mennonite Central Committee service workers, missionary prayer lists, participants in the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) or Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) exchanges and denominational bodies provided fertile ground for finding “relatives.”

Where our faith in Jesus Christ is the binding agent, everyone is family, especially in the Anabaptist Mennonite clan.

Our sense of kinship grew with every encounter at PA 2015: we sang in each other’s languages, built a house, canned vegetables, stitched quilts and comforters, were inked with henna designs, played football—together.

When language divided, smiles filled the silence until a new friend arrived to bridge the linguistic gulf.

This issue of *Courier/Correo/Courrier* celebrates PA 2015. I hope you recognize family in the photos and articles here. You can reflect on texts from the evening plenaries and highlights of the joint morning plenaries (pg 6-23) where bold, fresh, Young Anabaptist voices responded with challenging words to the seasoned wisdom of experienced leaders who spoke first.

You’ll meet Nelson Kraybill (pg 40) and Rebecca Osiro (pg 26-27), Mennonite World Conference’s newly commissioned president for the next six years and vice president for the next three. You’ll learn what church leaders from around the globe are “taking home” with them (pg 24-25). You’ll taste the energy and enthusiasm of the Global Youth Summit (GYS), a gathering for ages 18+ that preceded the main event, and meet former YABs committee members (pg 30-33).

But *walking with God/caminemos con Dios/en marche avec Dieu* is not always easy. Hundreds of brothers and sisters from the Global South desired to come but were denied visas to visit the United States. We grieve separation with them.

Conflict divides people—even nonviolent Mennonites—in our churches at both the congregational and conference level. Various Mennonite denominations are struggling with unity. We long to fellowship amid diversity.

Our churches in some areas of the world face persecution; martyrdom is not only a Mennonite characteristic of the past. Youth at GYS—some having made their own sacrifices for their convictions—wrote notes of encouragement to Sang-Min Lee, the first Anabaptist conscientious objector imprisoned in South Korea. We inspire each other through prayer and support.

The path God takes us on may not be smooth, but God comes alongside as the thorn remover (see pg 11). The Bible is our guide as the living word of God. And the church is our companion, our family, on the journey.

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Psalm 133). We spoke that verse to each other often at PA 2015. Now, separated in body, the differences in our theology and practice may tempt us to tend to our selves. In the years that lead us to our next gathering in Indonesia in 2021, may we remember that we are family. Let us live into that blessed unity through the Spirit of Christ.

Karla Braun is editor for Mennonite World Conference

Changes at *Courier/Correo/Courrier*

Devin Manzullo-Thomas, who has guided *Courier/Correo/Courrier* for two years, has relinquished his role as editor. He will be adding doctoral studies to his work as a professor at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA. It is my privilege to step into this service to the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world from my home in Winnipeg, Canada, where I participate in the Mennonite Brethren denomination. I was blessed to begin to meet some of you at Assembly and I anticipate continuing to grow my family through MWC.

Another change to *Courier/Correo/Courrier* affects the schedule. This Assembly edition is a double issue; however, it initiates a printing timeline of only two issues per year, in April and October. Mennonite World Conference will continue to provide news and information through the website (mwc-cmm.org) and electronic newsletter released monthly (see “Publication sign up” under “Get involved” at mwc-cmm.org).

Cover Photo:
A transcultural worship service at the 2015 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, 21–26 July 2015. Photo: Jonathan Charles



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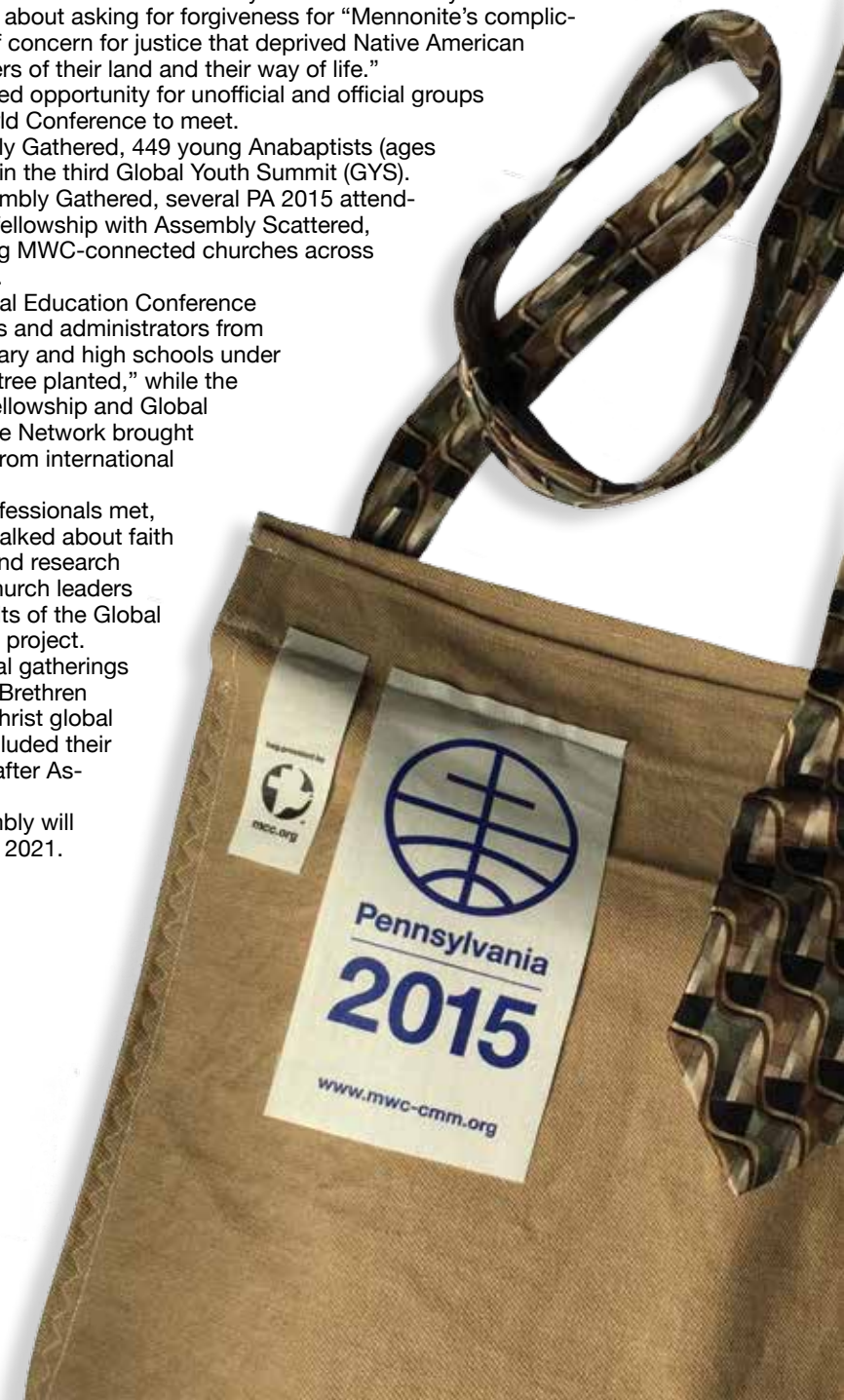
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Event bags were sewn by local volunteers—including groups of Amish—at Mennonite Central Committee’s Ephraim Material Resources Center from donated fabric and discarded neckties. Matching the dimensions of the school kits sent overseas, the bags could be donated to MCC after the Assembly.



Worshipping



Most often filled with a cacophony of livestock and crowd noise, the large auditorium of the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, was awash in songs of praise and worship and proclamation of the Word of God, 21–25 July 2015, during the 16th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference.

Kazutomo Ray Epp

Singing



Choir director Marcy Hostetler led the international music ensemble

Playing



Over 16 games, 269 soccer players participated in the first Anabaptist World Cup

Communing



Meals were eaten on compostable plates and flatware

Sharing



Reusable metal water bottles kept voices lubricated as conversations flowed

Learning



180 workshops and meetings explored topics from theology to activism

Serving



Afternoon was time for workshops or work, like serving at MCC's canner or MDS's house build



César García

César García spoke on Tuesday evening, 21 July 2015, at Assembly 16. He is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia.

Luke 24:13-35

I was 17 years old when an army captain asked me, “What would you do if our battalion was attacked tonight? What would you do if someone came and shot you?”

“I would pray,” I responded.

At that instant, I felt a sharp pain on my head. The captain had hit me with a lyre striker. A lyre is a musical instrument made of metal that produces sounds with a fiberglass striker. The pain was very intense. The captain asked me again, “What will you do if someone attacks you?” I said, “I am not going to defend myself.”

He hit me again and asked, “Why do you want to be a Christian? Aren’t you going to defend your country?” My answer was: “I follow Christ because I have found life in Him.”

Why was I responding like that? I was just 17, and at that time, I was full of doubts. In fact, I was experiencing a spiritual crisis to the point of almost losing my faith. I had left my church, I did not have Anabaptist convictions. Military service was compulsory in Colombia, and my Christian convictions weren’t strong enough that I was willing to go to jail for them.

Walking a path of learning

I think the reason I had the courage to respond that way can be found in Luke 24, where a story is told of two disciples who are on the road to Emmaus after the death and resurrection of Christ. “Walking” in the Gospel of Luke has a very special meaning: it is about a way of life or conduct. In this Gospel, *walking* is related to *discipleship*.

In Luke, many lessons are learned while walking. Here, the two disciples are talking and they don’t agree. Jesus comes up in the middle of the discussion and asks them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” In the original language, verse 15 conveys the idea that there was a strong difference of opinion between the two disciples.

Walking despite disagreement

Is walking together possible if we are in disagreement? Is it possible to live in a community as diverse as ours?

When we observe the map of the Mennonite World Conference, we

immediately realize that the Anabaptist movement is scattered around the world. Is walking together possible within our global community when we have so many cultural, theological and ecclesiological differences?

In Luke, the two disciples that had left Jerusalem were in strong disagreement. They had likely reached the point of asking themselves whether it was worth continuing together. But that was not the way that Jesus wanted his disciples to leave Jerusalem.

Leaving Jerusalem, facing our mission and our call, cannot be carried out if we are divided. Jesus wanted his disciples to leave Jerusalem filled with the Spirit to give testimony. This is probably why the two disciples had to return to Jerusalem.

“If you want to get there quickly, walk alone; if you want to go far, walk with others,” states a well-known African saying.

This is what the disciples discovered on their way to Emmaus. It is at the end of the journey in community, after walking together despite their differences, in the moment of celebrating communion that the disciples’ eyes were opened and their understanding of Christ was clarified (Luke 24:30-31). As a result, they returned to Jerusalem in unity.

Walking in different ways

The theme of our assembly, “Walking with God,” reflects various lessons we can learn from this passage. In each language, a different idea is expressed in reference to what it means to walk with God.

In English, *walking* refers to a constant action. It is a continuous, endless process, and thus calls for our whole life. When walking with God, we need to constantly ask ourselves, “What are we leaving behind? What do we need to take along on this journey?”

In Spanish, *caminemos* is an invitation. It is an invitation to abandon our fears, to open our hearts to become vulnerable. This journey requires patience: we need to wait for those who aren’t as fast and are tired. If we act with individualism and independence and consider that we don’t need any help, we will be strongly tempted to go separate ways. However, the invitation to walk together is still open.

In French, *en marche*, implies becoming completely involved in walking. There certainly will be tensions with other walkers that will cause many mixed feelings. But, if we walk totally committed to God and others, the tensions or problems that may arise will lead us to be transformed. If we don’t walk totally committed, those same tensions or problems will lead us to fragmentation.

The next part of the phrase, “with God/ *con Dios/avec Dieu*,” refers to communion with God. It is impossible to walk together if we aren’t walking with God.

Those disciples on the road to Emmaus were walking together despite their differences because God was at the centre of their walk. They discovered that unity wasn’t something that was miraculously achieved in the end; it is something that is built along the way. This unity leads to a transformation that can only be found in community.

Every day during this Assembly, we will reflect on the various moments we experience as we walk with God.

As the disciples surely experienced on the road to Emmaus, there will be moments of doubt and moments when we are sure we are on the right track.

“Unity wasn’t something that was miraculously achieved in the end; it is something that is built along the way.”

There will be moments of conflict and of reconciliation.

There will be moments when we want to walk alone in autonomy, but there will be times when we recognize our need to walk in community.

There will be moments when we need help and moments when we are ready to help.

This is the life of discipleship. We are in the midst of a process; we haven’t reached our goal yet, but are moving forward.

This passage helps me to understand why I responded to the captain the way I did. Beside me, there were four other soldiers who were also Christians. They weren’t Mennonites or Anabaptists. But

when the captain asked them the same questions, they responded that they were just obeying Jesus and weren’t willing to kill to defend themselves.

Some of these friends were on the floor in pain because of the blows. Therefore, I was able to respond the way I did because I had found a new community there. Four friends with whom I was ready to walk amid suffering, violence and persecution. Four friends to whom I could say, “Let’s walk with God” despite our differences. And tonight I would like to say to you, “Let’s walk with God,” let’s walk during this week and during the years to come.

Assembly opened with a welcome from local indigenous people and a parade of banners from member conferences and associated ministries. Below, Barry Lee and Joann McLaughlin play a traditional song.



Walking with God





Yukari Kaga

Yukari Kaga of Japan spoke on Wednesday evening, 22 July 2015, at Assembly 16. Yukari pastors several small Mennonite congregations in Hokkaido. She is chief director of the Peace Mission Center and serves at the Mennonite Education and Research Center in Japan.

1 Peter 1:3-9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Peter 1:3). Peter begins this letter with praise to God. This praising to God is a celebration of worship. This expression of blessing to God is found very often as doxologies, especially in psalms. So probably, the early churches in Asia Minor must have easily understood that Peter started this letter with worship.

But this sounds a little strange to me. Thinking of the background of this letter, the Christians of the churches in Asia Minor were in the midst of a risky situation. They had a severe possibility of losing their lives under their circumstance of worldwide persecution. Peter wrote this letter to Christians in such cruel situations. But simply. I have a question: how can we praise the Lord in a painful situation? How could Peter do that? How could the early church people understand this letter?

When circumstances threaten
It is sure that Peter wrote this letter to Christians. Peter definitely trusted these churches and greatly respected these church people. He must have known well about their deep predicament with tears and crying. Probably his letter must have reminded themselves as God’s chosen people “to be sprinkled with his blood” (1:2). So Peter must have known that his readers knew the meaning of blood in the imminent reality, because there were so many people dying. And still, even now, we know so many people dying.

When we face an unchangeable reality and are defeated under the circumstance, we have a struggle. We hold our faith tightly, but still struggle. This struggle causes an uneasy feeling, anxiety or fear. We are depressed and our hearts shrivel. We shrink with fear.

This happen to all of us, especially when we spend unstable time in a severe circumstance. This time is very painful because the reality challenges us. Questions make us feel doubt and doubt makes us lose conviction. Then, we get depressed and self-pity covers us with

a sense of wretchedness. We flinch and blanch with fear.

Ironing shrunken hearts
However, the Bible says “by his great mercy.” The Japanese Kanji character for mercy (originally from a pictograph of the Chinese character), shows that someone irons a shrunken heart with an antique style of the iron, not the modern electric iron we use now. Using the antique iron, someone irons our shrunken heart with a moderate temperature. It has neither a high temperature nor a low temperature, but exactly the right temperature.

This is the work of Holy Spirit. This Comforter irons our shrunken heart with exactly the right temperature again and again for our healing and for our regeneration.

God has done this to us and is doing this even now. And this God raised Jesus from the dead. There were so many people dying behind this passage in 1 Peter. And now, we still have so many people dying in this world.

“Faith is something to bring into the midst of our lives from outside of ourselves.”

But this God raised Jesus from the dead in the midst of people’s dying. Jesus died like any other person but his dying has swallowed death in his victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). This is the work of the God’s great power. And God works this power for all of us to shield our faith from the danger and restore our conviction in God’s great mercy.

Sometimes, we say we have faith. But faith is not something we have had within us from the beginning, nor something born inside of ourselves. Rather, faith is something to bring into the midst of our lives from outside of ourselves. God definitely makes us grasp the conviction that we all have been regenerated by believing that Christ Jesus was raised. In God’s ultimate power, we can stand up again in a living hope through the resurrection. And in this living hope, there is a life which gives a true life.

The light of our living hope
Peter wants to tell people about this joy so they can be saved in the light of this living hope. He knows well how wretched he used

to be. Through Christ’s blood, Peter found what he had never known before. Through the resurrection, Peter found himself regenerated in the light of the living hope. He found this; the only thing to do is to live in the light of this living hope. This is our Christian hope in the salvation to be



The Japanese Kanji character for mercy

revealed in the last time. So Peter could praise God. We seem to hear his strong, praising voice, singing with tears. Even if God challenges us, we praise God. Of course, we may stumble over many trials and sometimes may fall. But our faith never disappears because of the God’s shield. Nothing can conquer God’s shield. Our God wipes away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17). Again, we seem to hear joyful voices from this letter. And now, we also lift our voices together. Praising and singing, we follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, O Lord,
Have mercy on this world,
With your steadfast love and your abundant mercy.
Restore to us the joy of your salvation
and sustain in us a willing spirit.
Let us walk again in your living hope from here to follow as a disciple of Jesus our Lord. Amen.*



Clockwise from top: SaeJin Lee led the congregation in “The God of Glory”/Chukkeso Wangwiye from South Korea. Dan Arnold played classical Indian music on his sitar at the Global Church Village stage. The Gamelan ensemble from Conrad Grebel University College in Canada played traditional Balinese instruments. A local man played harp.

The Holy Spirit’s mercy irons us in our trials





Aubrey Kleider



Jim Cheng



Jim Cheng

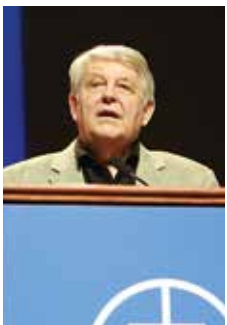


Monica Figueroa

Clockwise from top left: Children's activities entertained and inspired during plenary sessions. Volunteers demonstrated sewing techniques to participants working on comforters. Videos from the four commissions, IVEP and YAMEN aired during plenary sessions. Don McNiven coordinated the music ensemble which included gospel singer Dodó Miranda. The Global Church Village was a relaxed venue to explore cultural displays and hear music. Volunteers built a house for Mennonite Disaster Service. Off-site tours visited historical sites and farms in the neighbouring areas. Friendship groups after morning plenaries provided space to interact with different perspectives.



Jonathan Charles



Jon Carlson



Jon Carlson



Jonathan Charles



John Eby



Jonathan Charles



Merle Good

Rebecca Osiro is a pastor in the Kenya Mennonite Church, EFC Congregation, Nairobi, Kenya. She was elected vice president of MWC at the 2015 General Council meeting s. Tom Yoder Neufeld is a retired Mennonite Bible professor from Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Faith & Life Commission

God walks with us

Acts 12:6-17
Hebrews 11:1; 12:12-15

Tom: We walk with God in doubt and conviction. After all, "faith is the reality of things *hoped* for, the proof of things *not* seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Rebecca: Among the Luo of Kenya *kiawa*—doubt—is used in a situation where the end result is not certain. Doubt is shaped by context.

In my country, walking through forests and thickets is full of uncertainties and dangers: attacks from social misfits and criminals, wild animals or thorny shrubs. Under such circumstances, one would doubt safe arrival at one's destination.

In this setting, even the less dangerous pricks require assistance. *Jakol kudho*—the thorn remover—walks along and intervenes in the face of danger. He or she gives assurance, appreciation, and offers direction to the traveller.

Stories in the Bible correlate with the Luo's usage of *kiawa* and *jakol kudho*. The possibility of doubt in one's *wuoth* (walk or journey) is replaced with conviction full of hope.

Jakol kudho intervenes in difficult situations to allow the sojourner time to articulate issues and respond accordingly, similar to delay in execution of Peter that gave brethren time to offer passionate prayer (Acts 12).

Christ, the greatest *jakol kudho* is with us even when there seems to be no way. We should not forget that it is darkest just before dawn! With *jakol kudho*, doubts are but necessary windows of conviction.

Tom: In the Global North doubt is unavoidable, and often a necessary and good thing.

Hebrews 11 is realistic about faith: faith is the assurance of things we *cannot* see (11:1).

But Hebrews also insists that there is someone with us—our *jakol kudho*, Jesus the "pioneer of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), leading the way.

The Bible may not always be a clear map, but it is a truthful witness to a God who walks in solidarity with us in the darkest of times, reminding us that we are not the first for whom faith is a struggle.

As much as the church often puts our faith to the test, it is also God's gift for giving strength and depth to our convictions. They are the body of Christ, the body of the thorn remover.

They—you!—are God walking with us in doubt and conviction.

Thanks be to God.

Young Anabaptists (YABs)

Doubt sharpens our convictions

The weight of doubt and conviction is not always similar. Especially living in such a postmodern age, where everything has the right to be on the table, where everything is correct and everyone is a thorn remover, it is common to find young people in my church, in your church, in her church, in his church, in their church who are living in doubt and conviction.

Faith is like walking with doubt and conviction. Despite our wishes and clever attempts, it is impossible that travellers succeed to escape thorns. Doubt is a key to deepen our conviction in our walk with God. I don't want my doubts to drive me crazy and lead me away from my walk with the Lord. At times, the doubts that I have feel so strong that I feel that it is in a verge of taking me down.

However, there is a glimpse of hope, the person of Jesus. Jesus Christ who is the starter and finisher of our faith. I plead the body of Christ to show us his work in your life so that I could truly emulate and experience it in my life. Jesus is Emanuel, God with us, walking with us in all the ups and downs.

How could I turn these cognitive propositions into life conviction that surpass my doubts? The Lord is there to help.

We can get an answer for our doubt or we can learn to live with our doubt in our walk with God. With the help of the community of

faith and our allegiance with Christ, doubt helps us seek understanding and deepen our faith.

Let's share our doubts, whether abundance or lack and instability become reason for doubt. Let's share our conviction with each other before the Lord Jesus that



Kazutomo Ray Epp

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle serves her church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has served as an MWC intern at MCC's New York UN Office, and in Ethiopia with MEDA and Compassion International. She served on the YABs committee until 2015.

can be able to surpass our doubt. As we strengthen our relationship with him with the help of the faith community, doubt will sharpen our convictions. Walking in doubt and conviction is like riding a bicycle: one pedal is doubt and the other one is conviction. Without both, the journey faith can't be possible.

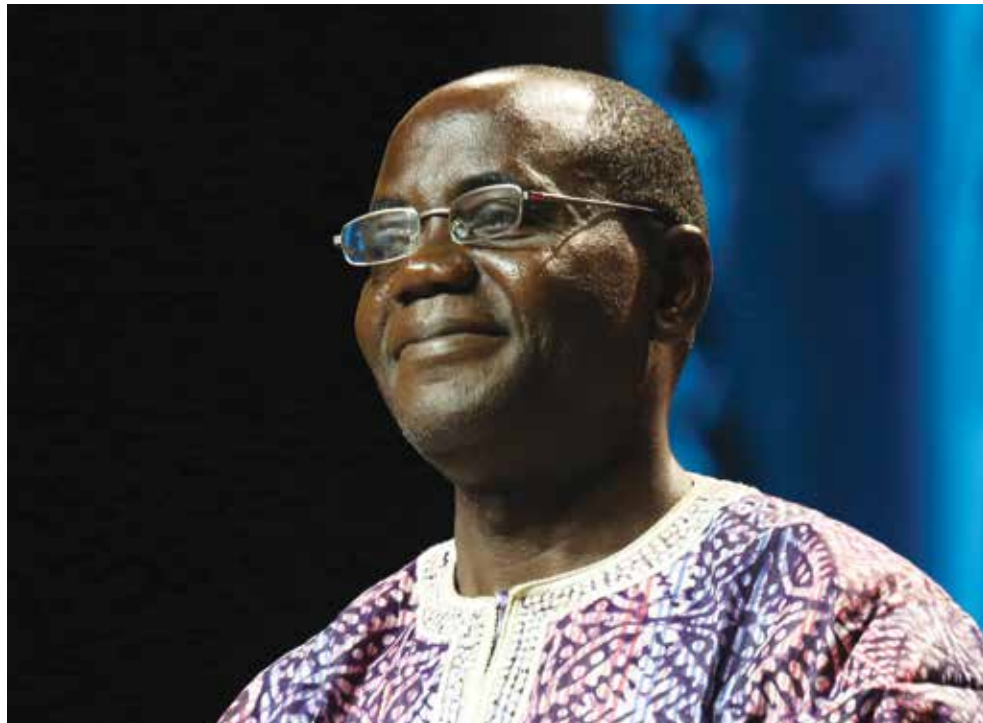


Kazutomo Ray Epp



Monica Figueroa

Larry Miller and Anne-Cathy Graber brought greetings from the Global Christian Forum. Choirs sang on the Global Church Village stage.



Jonathan Charles

Nzuzi Mukawa

Nzuzi Mukawa of the Democratic Republic of Congo spoke on Thursday evening, 23 July 2015 at Assembly 16. Nzuzi is the team leader for MB Mission in sub-Saharan Africa. He is both a professor of missions and an associate pastor of a Mennonite Brethren congregation in DR Congo.

1 Samuel 25:1-44
2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Today, world security is threatened by international, intertribal and even interreligious conflicts. Sometimes, security forces have conflicts with the very people they are supposed to protect. Terrorism has created a climate of insecurity on the international level. Countries are torn apart by wars. Political-religious movements such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Boko Haram spill blood in the name of religion. Opinions and philosophies divide people and create divided households.

Conflict undermines the basic social units of a strong and balanced society. It can cause divorce. It sends children into the street. It creates enemies within families and dissolves businesses, sending staff into unemployment.

Since its very beginning, the church has not been spared conflict, internally or externally. At the external level, the church has been and continues to be the victim of persecution. Internally, the church has always had to confront controversies and hierarchical conflicts. For example, the Anabaptists left the Protestant reform movement in the 16th century due to a conflict.

Our world, no matter how peaceful it may seem, is dominated by conflicts. How can the church in general and Christians in particular walk toward reconciliation in this contentious world? Is it possible for us to promote reconciliation in a world where conflict is gaining ground?

Analysis of 1 Samuel 25:1-35

The story in 1 Samuel 25:1-35 provides a model for walking toward conflict and from conflict to reconciliation. In analyzing this text, we can draw out practical implications that help us to grasp God's thoughts about conflict and reconciliation.

Walking toward conflict (v.1-13)

In verses 2-13 of the account in 1 Samuel 25, we meet Nabal, Abigail, David and messengers. Their encounters lead to a moment of opposition which turns into a conflict.

Nabal is a very wealthy man who lacks spiritual values and strength of character (v.2-3). Nabal's hard-heartedness is accompanied by spitefulness.

When David learns that Nabal's sheep are being shorn, he sends some of his servants to ask Nabal for help for his group who is in the wilderness.

In his message to Nabal, David shows kindness, gentleness and humility. Militarily, he is higher than Nabal, but he uses a peaceful voice, appealing to Nabal's sense of gratitude at a time of joy and festivities. He reminds Nabal that David's group protected Nabal's sheep in the wilderness. In spite of David's effort to approach Nabal with an attitude to promote peace, Nabal responds to David's kindness with harshness, to his courtesy with contempt, to his confidence with disdain and hatred (v. 10-11). Nabal's malice in the face of David's kindness leads to conflict (v.13) because David becomes angry and returns Nabal's violence with violence.

We learn from these first 13 verses what are the primary factors promoting conflict in this story:

- Nabal's harshness and malice are in opposition to the good faith and culture of peace shown by David (v.6-8). They incite the two sides to walk into conflict.
- Nabal's selfishness leads him not only to refuse to share what he has with those in need, but also to refuse to recognize and thank those who have helped to protect his property. This is what makes David so angry that he decides to teach this man a lesson with violence.
- The contact between David and Nabal is handled by messengers who also play an active role in this conflict. The way in which they give information also contributes to the explosion of conflict.

The factors promoting conflict in this passage are the same today. How can the church promote peace in such circumstances?

From conflict to reconciliation (v.14-35)

The second section of our story begins another sequence of events. The principal actors are Nabal's servant, Abigail and David.

Nabal's reaction does not leave his team indifferent. Nabal's servants disapprove of the way he acts and expect reprisals from David and his servants. A prudent man, who sees danger and hides (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12), one servant helps his mistress to understand the situation. He proposes a way to get around their master, whose character could not allow him to accept reconciliation that brings peace (v.17).

Abigail listens well. Her approach to the

situation demonstrates courage, tact and humility (v.18-20). Her peaceful strategy is built around a team working for peace (v.19). She faces up to conflict with a peaceful plan (v.20), all the while managing obstacles to peace (v.19). She asks for forgiveness without embarrassment, and offers to meet needs and calm spirits.

What lesson can we learn from the way in which this woman models conflict resolution, and from the process she uses to achieve reconciliation?

Reconciliation, the path to conflict resolution

God does not want his children to participate in conflicts, but wants them to work for peace (Ephesians 4:1-3) as Abigail does. She follows a path of reconciliation which gives up hostility and re-establishes civility and communion between formerly hostile parties.

Reconciliation is an urgent need in our world. We need to re-establish communion

“The work of the cross gives us peace and justice – not just for the church, but for the entire world.”

between God and humanity (Romans 5:8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:19-22); between human beings (Ephesians 2:11-22) and to reestablish harmony in the entire creation (Romans 8:18-22). Hope for our reconciliation is rooted in the work of Christ on the cross, which wiped out God's anger and judgment of humanity.

The cross of Christ provides for reconciliation. On the cross, Christ erased the act which condemned us and triumphed over the hostility and all the cultural barriers which separated us (Colossians 2:14-15). The work of the cross gives us peace and justice – not just for the church, but for the entire world. We are called not only to believe in peace and justice, but to apply them to all without distinction or discrimination, and to promote them to the entire world through the proclamation of the good news of salvation.

Following the example of Christ, the church must work for love, peace and justice in spite of the price which must be paid (Isaiah 11:1-5; 61:1-3; Luke 4:13,19). The church must demonstrate compassion by its ability to see and to hear the cry of the oppressed and to identify with just

causes. It is only God who reconciles us with himself by sacrificing Jesus on the cross, the pivot point of reconciliation.

Reconciliation between humans is rooted in Christ who is the peace of the world (Ephesians 2:14-17) and the source of unity for all humanity (John 17:11, 22, 23).

Reconciliation passes through the resolution of conflicts, not only on the personal level, but also at the ethnic and tribal level, and at the level of the church.

Conflict resolution at the personal level

The Word of God teaches us that the best way to resolve conflicts is on the personal level. This involves confession before God of all sins we are aware of (1 John 1:9-10; Psalm 139:23-24) and commitment to asking for forgiveness and deciding not to repeat the same fault (Ephesians 4:32; James 5:16).

The Gospels propose this process for us:

- Pray sincerely to God and ask for forgiveness;
- Speak alone with the other person;
- Speak with the other person in the presence of two or three people;
- Speak with the other person before the church (Matthew 18:15-17).

A desire to honour God and love for the other person are necessary for conflicts to be resolved (Psalm 34:15). We must always seek divine help and ask for wisdom, self-control and appropriate speech (Proverbs 16:32; James 1:5).

In addition, we must use the rules for good communication: listen to the other person, state the truth, speak in a fair way with love, express ideas clearly and speak with integrity for the glory of God and the well-being of the other person. The objectives for this good communication are to resolve the problems which led to the conflicts. End meeting times with prayer and with words of fraternity or kindness (James 3:13-18).

Conflict resolution at the ethnic, tribal and racial level

Ethnic, tribal and racial conflicts are often the shame of the church. Our silence seems to be a form of complicity to such an extent that today, wise thinkers accuse the church of creating or participating in this kind of conflict, such as the history and heritage of racism and the slave trade, the Holocaust, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, discrimination against native populations, interreligious/political/ethnic violence, the suffering of the Palestinians, caste oppression and tribal genocide.

In the face of this situation, I call on pastors, church leaders and all readers to teach the biblical truth about ethnic

Light and hope for those in darkness



diversity, but also to acknowledge the concept of sin in these ethnic groups. In Christ, all our ethnic identities are subordinated to our identity as assets purchased at the cross. In practical terms, the church must:

- **Prioritize healing and reconciliation:** In case of aggression, self-defense is permitted, but not the use of violence. Following the example of Jesus, who did not use weapons when threatened, the church must walk in the steps of the master. The church must demonstrate the attitude of caring for its enemies as illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, and practice nonviolence as the door to reconciliation.
- **Promoting justice** is an important way to reduce ethnic and religious conflicts in the world. To do this, the church must become deeply involved in standing up to injustice, to ethnocentrism, to racism and to oppression. It must get involved in reconciliation and identify itself with the oppressed, working for justice for them.
- **Develop an inclusive church:** The church cannot be a site for ethnic divisions and racial discrimination; rather it must be a setting where all are invited and taken into fellowship. Leaders must not be selected on criteria that favour ethnicity or race over spirituality. The church must not have an ethnic agenda. It is an entity of "unity in diversity" where all members are one in Christ as taught in Galatians 3:28. The church is a new ethnic group in which there is mutual protection and security for everyone.

- **Guide our approach to politics and to management of public property with Christian principles:** Political opinions must not be molded by ethnic, tribal or racial prejudices but by Christian principles. Christians who are politicians must deal correctly with everyone without prejudice based on political or religious ideology. Politicians must avoid ethnic favouritism and religious fanaticism, which often encourage hatred.

- **Practice love and forgive enemies:** Praying for enemies is one of the signs of obedience and submission to Jesus Christ. We must love other people because they are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9). Forgiveness is often very difficult to give, especially when we are victims of injustice, hatred and oppression. But we must be willing to obey the Word of God.

Conflict resolution in the church

The walk toward reconciliation requires the church to obey scriptural principles and to defend them to the world through the way it lives. It must display transparency by relying

on biblical teachings. The church must continue to count on God's help so that it can resolve conflicts more effectively. It must avoid lack of respect for its own legal and juridical texts.

The church must avoid favouritism. In its prophetic role, it must be watchful and active to:

- Always pull itself back to God's will, commandments and precepts, and tell the world about those things.
- Discover the true nature of the problems in the church and in the world by deeply studying the causes, motives, sources and origins both near and far, in order to propose solutions without taking sides.
- Look for peaceful solutions and stand up to the sinful politics of exclusion and marginalization. The church must prioritize political systems which promote unity and reconciliation.

The reconciliation of people with creation

We must be people who take care of creation, because reconciliation also includes creation. Human life and creation are linked together because the earth takes care of us (Genesis 1:29-30); the earth suffers with us because of humanity's sins which have caused heavy consequences (Hosea 4:1-3); God's redemption includes creation (Psalm 96:10-13); everything was reconciled at the cross (Colossians 1:15-23); and the good news includes all of creation.

In light of this state of affairs, the church in general and Christians in particular must be on the frontlines of the efforts to protect creation. We must have a great desire to live on a green planet by avoiding the waste of energy, by reducing our use of carbons, by recycling our environment and by avoiding pollution.

In the same vein, we must support political and economic initiatives which protect the environment from all kinds of destruction. So we must support those among us who are called and sent by God with a special mission to protect the environment, and to do scientific research in the fields of ecology and nature conservation.

Conclusion

Violence has been used in many different ways to resolve the incessant conflicts throughout the world. But history proves that has not succeeded in bringing solutions to the problems of the world. The way of violence promises hatred, anger and vengeance instead of peaceful resolution for conflict.

Indeed, nonviolence is the ultimate solution to conflicts. Christ was nonviolent

when confronted by conflicts. He outlines for us the model which we should use when resolving conflicts.

The nonviolent model for resolving conflicts, as we have discovered in the story about Abigail, is not synonymous with passively accepting injustice and aggression without protecting ourselves. It means we do not use force as a means of resolving conflicts.

The church must actively resist religious and ethnic conflicts. Only love for the enemy and the determination not to use force or violence can withstand conflicts and peacefully engage the enemy. This eliminates the structures of injustice and replaces them with good structures that have God at the centre.

Ethnic diversity is the gift and the plan of God in creation. It has been dirtied and deformed by human sin and pride which produce confusion, quarrels, violence and wars between nations.

However, this diversity will be preserved in the new creation when people from all nations, from all tribes, from all the people groups and all the languages will be reunited because they make up the people whom God has redeemed.

Because of the gospel, I ask the body of Christ collectively and individually to repent and to ask forgiveness in all places where they have participated in violence, injustice and ethnic oppression.

Today, the church must embrace the great power of reconciliation found in the gospel, and really learn about it, because Christ did not carry our sins on the cross only so that we would be reconciled with God, but also to destroy our animosities and so that we can be reconciled with each other.

Let us adopt a reconciliation style of life by forgiving those who persecute us and having the courage to expose the injustice they cause to others. Let us provide aid and offer hospitality to those on the other side of a conflict by taking the initiative to cross barriers to achieve reconciliation. Let us continue to witness about Christ in violent contexts, always ready to suffer or even die, rather than participate in acts of destruction or vengeance. Let us get involved in the long process of healing wounds, making the church a safe place of healing for all, including old enemies.

We must be a bright light and a source of hope. We must share this witness: "God in Christ, reconciling all people to himself." The cross and the resurrection of Christ grant us the authority to confront the demonic powers of evil which exacerbate human conflicts.



Kazutomo Ray Epp

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Peace Commission

Children of light

1 Thessalonians 5

1 Thessalonians 5 is not usually called upon as a source of teaching on conflict within the church. This early letter wasn't a response to conflict among Jesus believers. Yet, in the midst all this eschatological fervour, Paul has within his core convictions the importance of how believers live together day by day.

For Paul, being "children of light" is a community label in the midst of the forces of darkness (not people but powers). Jesus' followers can watch for the Day of the LORD with confidence. We know that the times are dark. However, Paul describes God's people rather than God's own self putting on armour: what Jesus' followers wear sounds like the virtues underlined in 1 Corinthians 13: the "breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (v.8).



Monica Figueroa

It is time for followers of Jesus to be found in the places where the darkness of violence and injustice threatens. We also must be present with people sitting beside us in church who hunger for a deeper experience of God in the face of overwork, over-entertainment, or overeating.

Paul's counsel sounds simple: "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing" (v.11).

One of the fundamental purposes of MWC has been for members of our faith family to build each other up. Often, we have not done this very well. Yet in the history of Christian ancestors through the centuries, stories of building each other up are woven like gold threads into the texture of institutional problems. For example, Quaker John Woolman, a strong opponent of slavery, worked for years urging fellow Quaker slaveholders to free their slaves.

The apostle Paul tells us that we know what time it is: it is a time for God's people in Christ Jesus to be children of light in our world. His end-time words are not to call forth fear, violence, or division, nor to pull us out of living like Christ in the everyday. He wants all his churches to do what he is doing: build each other up.

Young Anabaptists (YABs)

Soldiers in the army of the living God

Ephesians 4:1-7

As we worship God in different styles, God must be smiling as God savours the sweet aroma of worship, rising to the throne, offered by God's children.

Thus, I wonder: does God weep when the very same children cannot walk together

in peace? What does God think when God sees us walking in conflict, struggling for reconciliation, and too often, choosing to part ways?

Many Christians today do not behave like soldiers, but act like children. Instead of multiplying through church planting, they spread around through church "splanting," a church that has been planted because somebody split up with another church.

What happened to the body of Christ who stands united in one hope, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism that worships and serves that one God and Father of all? What happened to the eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

The church must not lose grip of the foundation in which it is built (1 Corinthians 3:11). Unless the church goes back to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ



Merle Good

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and His saving power, it will continue to live powerless in conflict and in pain.

Christian soldiers, sound the battle cry of the church that Christ has redeemed: the church saved by grace through faith and not by works; the church, living not with its own agenda that promotes religion but rather, a relationship with the Saviour.

I appeal to church leaders who are in the forefront of church conflict battles. You cannot win these battles if you stick to your own agenda, forget to focus your eyes on Jesus and lay down the full armor of God because you are too tired.

For those who are trapped in the midst of church conflict, know that God's love is persistent, nurturing and pursuing. Always remember the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He has already won the victory over our sins and issues. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, from whom we can find healing. Fight a good fight of faith by being bold and valiant soldiers.



Wieteke van der Molen

Wieteke van der Molen of the Netherlands spoke on Friday evening, 24 July 2015, at Assembly 16. Wieteke, who pastors a small rural Mennonite congregation north of Amsterdam, loves to read and tell stories.

Genesis 32:23-32

In the beginning, man was alone. Even though God created all animals and brought them to man to be named, man was alone. And it didn't suit him at all.

God could see that, and so he whispered a deep, deep sleep unto man and while he slept, God took his rib and from it created the other part of man: woman.

From that very early day on, humanity was community.

From the day we are born, we are part of a community. Whether it be a family, tribe, orphanage or school, we are never alone. The community feeds us, cleans us, teaches us right from wrong, raises us.

It makes us stronger than we are, because in it we are more than just one person. We are many. It makes us weaker than we are, because we have to bend our will to the rules of the community, give up our autonomy.

Within a community, we cannot stand alone. The interest of the group will collide with that of the individual. And that will cause friction and pain and frustration. But we have no other way. To be human is to be part of a community. We cannot survive on our own.

Still, we crave autonomy, every one of us. Growing up, we test the rules and boundaries of our communities. You can see it in small toddlers, pushing the "no!" just a bit further to see where it will go. You can see it in rebellious young adults designing their own way in life, making their own choices.

And yes, autonomy literally means making your own rules. But the modern interpretation lies more in the way of carving your own path through life, being independent.

We desperately want to have a say in everything that concerns us, we want to make our own decisions, to do and be our best. In these modern times, we take pride in our autonomy, in being able to fend for ourselves, in living by our own rules and standing up for them.

Struggling against community

But autonomy is no party. In fact, it is a constant struggle. And so it has always been, even in Old Testament times, as in

the well-known story of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

Even before he is born, Jacob is in community. And even as an unborn child he doesn't take it too well. He and his twin brother fight so fiercely inside the womb that their mother Rebecca wonders why she is still alive. When he is born, he is still grabbing his older brother's heel.

In Jacob's book, Jacob comes first. Always. No rules but his own. And he bends community around it.

Easily, with nothing more than a hot meal, he swindles his brother Esau out of his birthright. Next, Jacob deceives his father. Isaac, blind from old age, lies on his deathbed, waiting for Esau to turn up to give him his blessing. Jacob comes in, pretending to be his older brother. He ruthlessly steals the patriarchal blessing.

Jacob now has everything that should rightfully be Esau's. He has won all, and at the same time, he lost all. For he cannot stay in the community he so despised. He has to flee for his life.

Living by your own set of rules and living in a community do not go well together.

Calling his own shots

In fleeing the scene of the crime, Jacob leaves everything. Or so he thinks. But just before he enters the great unknown, he has a dream. In that dream, God promises to go with Jacob wherever he may go. God will protect him, God will bring him back, God will not leave Jacob until God has fulfilled God's promise.

Typically, Jacob is not sure. He calls the place *Beth-el*, the house of God, but he immediately starts negotiating. *If God will really be with me, if God really will protect me, if God really will provide for me, well, then, yes, in that case, God will be my God.* Jacob does not give in easily. Oh no. If God wants to stay with him, fine. But Jacob is calling the shots. That's what autonomy is all about, right?

And the story continues. Jacob's love for his Rachel is famous. But in trying to marry her before her older sister Leah is married, Jacob once again tries to make community bend to his own rules. Funnily, he is no match for the tricks up Laban's sleeve and he ends up with four women in all.

After some 20 years of hard labour, God calls Jacob back to Canaan. Jacob takes up his wives, his children (11 sons and a daughter at that time) and the herds he gathered and he sneaks off when Laban is busy shearing sheep.

Again, Jacob is making choices without considering the effect on other people. Living by his own rules, his own fears, his own assumptions. In sneaking off with his wives

and children, he overlooks the fact that they are part of Laban's life too: daughters, grandchildren, future.

Of course, it is his right as an autonomous person. He lives by his own law. No consideration for any kind of community.

Offering it all up

Surprisingly, on the brink of coming home, the leopard changes his spots. Jacob realizes that Esau might not be very happy to welcome him home, considering the way Jacob deceived him before. Jacob tries to secure the peace, by sending messengers ahead. But they return, saying Esau is coming their way with at least 400 men. Jacob (impressed, worried, scared) is now confronted with the consequences of his earlier choices: what if Esau takes it all: wives, children, herds, riches? What if Esau wants retribution, revenge?

What if community pays it all back to autonomy?

“Living by your own set of rules and living in a community do not go well together.”

And so, Jacob takes a bold decision: he offers it all up to Esau, of his own free will. In doing so, he tries to make amends for what he has done. He acknowledges his wrongdoing, and the consequences his choices had on Esau's life.

In offering up everything his autonomy has gained him, Jacob in fact offers his autonomy itself to Esau.

And so, we enter that epic scene, where Jacob brings his wives and children, all he owns, to the other side of the river and then returns. Now, he is totally and truly alone. He has nothing left. Not even autonomy. And then somebody comes and wrestles him. All night long. Somebody. No name. No identification, except the ominous *Why do you ask me for my name?* (32:29). Is it God himself? One of his messengers? Or do we have to understand this all in a more metaphorical way? Is Jacob in fact wrestling himself?

Maybe. After all, the life of Jacob is one big struggle with the people around him and their rules and expectations, with himself and his own choices, his own way through life. Maybe in the end, he does wrestle God. Or himself. Or another metaphorical person. It does not matter.

What matters is that he comes out winning. With a new blessing. With a new

name. No longer Jacob: "heelgrabber," but Israel: "wrestles with God."

Jacob no longer seeks to enrich himself by grabbing the heel of others, causing them to fall and fail. Instead, he struggles for the rest of his life, every day anew. With the people around him, with God, and far most...with himself.

And you know what? Most of the time, he comes out winning. Slightly limping, but winning nevertheless. And as he crosses the river, a new dawn rises. A patriarch is born.

What a story.

A lesson in consequences

But the truly amazing thing about the story of Jacob is that it doesn't explicitly condemn Jacob or his actions. There is not one point where the story, or even God himself explicitly disapproves of what Jacob does.

You can feel it is not all good and beautiful, but the story itself keeps quiet about it. It just shows the consequences, shows you the effect of Jacob's actions: he has to flee and leave everything behind. He lives in constant fear, of Esau, of Laban, of Esau again. He has to start all over again, many times.

The story tells you all that. But the story never tells you that Jacob did wrong. You can feel it. You can read it between the lines, but it is all in your imagination, really. The story never says so.

And that's what makes it such an intriguing story. Jacob is no holy, immanently good or pious wonder of a human being. He makes a great example because he is not exemplary at all. He is just like any of us. And so in our heads and hearts, we easily fill in the blanks. We feel how utterly wrong some of his decisions are as if they are our own. We shiver, thinking of the consequences. We wait, anxiously, for the story to go sour.



How to be independent together



Morning Presentations

And it never does. Despite living by his own rules and never quite recognizing the rights of other people, there is no judgment for Jacob except that which he issues himself. Fundamentally, that is what this story is all about. Autonomy. Living by your own rules. Making your own law.

For autonomy doesn't just mean you make your own choices and live by your own rules. It means you have to judge yourself too. There is no one else. Not even God, according to this story. You have to figure it out by yourself. God merely walks with you, whatever the outcome. It is Jacob who makes demands and utters conditions, not God.

And that is an Old Testament lesson for all of us modern people, craving autonomy. Autonomy comes with the acknowledgment that the people around you (your community) limit your freedom to make your own decisions, your own rules. Autonomy in this modern sense is not about making your own rules no matter what, but about realizing, accepting and acknowledging the other people in your life. It is about willingly respecting these, because together you form a community.

So the question is: are we capable, am I capable of sculpting my own life within these boundaries? Can I live my life free and independently (autonomously) *within* community?

Am I mature enough to acknowledge the fact that I am not totally in charge of my own life? Can I accept that I am bound by the people I love, by the community around me, and by God who walks with me wherever I go?

Or, in a broader sense, will it be possible for various churches to keep their autonomy *within* the wider Anabaptist community? Are we prepared to wrestle?

The story of Jacob teaches us that it is not wrong to follow your own way through life. It is not wrong to try to test your own strength and to strive for autonomy. It is not about being wrong or being right. It is about making your own choices, and at the same time acknowledging those of the community around you. It is about recognizing the hurt and pain and frustration on both sides. It is about taking responsibility. For your actions, for those of the community. For yourself. And, if necessary, making amends.

That kind of autonomy, the grown-up, modern kind, doesn't come easily. Growing up is not easy. To keep some sense of autonomy within community is like constantly wrestling with people and God and most of all yourself.

And even if you win, it leaves you slightly limping.



Clockwise from top left: Friendship groups exchanged ideas and perspectives. Meals provided time for fellowship. Henna artists inked hands at the Global Church Village. Brethren Choral Sounds choir from Zimbabwe performed on the Global Church Village stage. Women theologians groups charted concerns.



Shantkumar S. Kunjam has pastored several congregations in the Mennonite Church in India Conference and was ordained bishop.

Deacons Commission

In Christ, free to love

Galatians 5:13-14

The community of faith is shared lives of people freed in Christ Jesus and joined together to serve one another through love. This freedom is not only for serving one another, but also to serve and do good to people outside the community of faith, and even to those who hate us. This is the divine royal lifestyle we are called to live out both individually and jointly: our walking in autonomy and community.

The challenge is to stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Galatians 5:1). This global community today is richer by our diversity and uniqueness.

Let us accept, appreciate, enjoy and cherish one another's uniqueness, diversity, gifts and services in our community.

Through love, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us endeavour to develop in ourselves and in our communities the lifestyle that reflects the godly life in Jesus Christ our Lord, bringing praises to our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16).

Through love, bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Let us mutually share gifts and talents with one another in the worldwide community of faith, showing our love for one another.

Through love let us do good to all (Gal. 6:10). This royal law of twin commands is the only remedy to Churches' internal maladies and the only Christian fortification against external hatred and persecutions. Let us resolve in our hearts and minds that we will practice this law of loving and

serving in our individual and joint lives, no matter what the cost.

We are mandated to be prepared to face persecutions and terrorism. Therefore, I urge the local churches, conferences and Mennonite World Conference to develop practical guidelines for ways to lovingly and peacefully relate, individually and jointly, with friends and with persecutors and terrorists.

The freedom in Jesus Christ invites us to demonstrate in our personal and community lives the character of God in Jesus Christ, and to share our lives with one another in loving service.

This is a freedom that reaches out to our neighbours and even to those who hate and mean to harm us.

This is our "Walking with God in Autonomy and Community."



Kevin Ressler is a bi-cultural/bi-racial individual with a Tanzanian mother, American father. He has an M.Div. and a degree in justice, peace, and conflict studies.

Young Anabaptists (YABs)

Repentance and forgiveness

Matthew 23:1-29

[In MWC], we all share one thing and that is an Anabaptist history and thought. We are all ethnically Anabaptist, for we carry that version of Christ with us wherever we go. That Anabaptism becomes our new core identity.

Walking in Autonomy and Community is not an easy task.

Many of us have become Pharisees so well versed in the Bible that we have words without meaning.

In our lust for comfort and power, we have made the church about individuals over God's kingdom. We have forgotten how sin is not just an individual thing but one of the whole community as well. Woe

unto us for we have chosen to take the power of Jesus Christ and selfishly use it for our own gain to keep out others who are different from us.

How can the Anabaptist church regain its confidence and become boldly prophetic again?

Through vulnerability, we must support one another not by pointing out the other's sins but by acknowledging our own. Repentance is acknowledging that I have sinned and choosing to turn away from that action. Jesus, I confess too often I have neglected your call to share my abundance with those who have less.

I confess that we have chosen destruction over construction, bombs over bread.

I confess that the church has benefited me by rejecting to welcome others. We have chosen comfort over choosing Christ's children.

I confess that the Bible and prayer are too often used as weapons to narrow the gate instead of widening the path.

We repent and seek forgiveness. Lord, lead us forward.

As we move into this new century, we must learn to listen to one another. We must see the value in the missioned as much as the missionary. We must learn to grow together as peers instead of planters and plants, unequal in power and influence.

There is no value in autonomy if we do not suspend our individual prioritization to benefit the community with our uniqueness. This is true both of us as individual peoples in our church societies and our individual churches in this world conference.





Bruxy Cavey

Bruxy Cavey of Canada spoke on Saturday evening, 25 July 2015 at Assembly 16. Bruxy is the teaching pastor of The Meeting House, one of Canada's largest and most innovative churches. A member of the Brethren in Christ, Bruxy is an author and speaks extensively around the world.

Galatians 5:22-23

We are a peace church because we are first and foremost a Jesus church and Jesus leads us in the way of peace. We care about justice because we care about Jesus and he cares about justice. We care about reconciliation and we care about the Word of God in print because we want to get to know the Word of God in person.

Jesus is at the centre of who we are. And as we continue to keep Jesus central and steward the clear and simple message of Jesus, we give that back to the rest of the body of Christ as a gift and make us all healthier.

Love is the fruit of the Spirit

I want to talk to you about love as reflected in the fruit of the Spirit and other passages of the New Testament. The Spirit's work in us is the work of love. To the extent that we work against love, we are working against the work of the Spirit in us, and to the extent that we recognize and identify love, we are moving in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Most scholars agree that when Galatians 5 lists the fruit of the Spirit, it doesn't just start with love. Love is the fruit of the Spirit and what follows are eight descriptions of what love is like. Similar to 1 Corinthians 13, this is a representative list. The fruit of the Spirit is love, and you'll begin to recognize it when you see joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness, gentleness and self-control.

I have over the years become increasingly convinced of love's centrality in our worship of God and how he calls us to worship him by loving others around us. It has become increasingly important to me to identify that and to call myself to that kind of love as a form of worship.

It seemed to me, growing up, that my priority was to get my relationship with God right. I would do that by spending

increased time focusing on my vertical relationship. When I finally got that right, there would be overflow on the people around me. I would learn to love others well, but I needed to first come back and make sure I studied Scripture privately, prayed privately, meditated privately. It became my emphasis.

The second commandment

As we grow, we are encouraged to have those times of private spiritual expression, but Jesus was the first to begin to challenge me to go beyond this. It was the way he joined the two great commandments together into one when he was asked by a religious leader what is the greatest commandment. The greatest commandment – singular. Jesus said it's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I picture the religious leaders who asked the question saying, *thank you very much*, and going to leave. Then Jesus says, *and the second is like it*.

The second? What second commandment? He didn't ask for the top two, he only asked for one. But Jesus wouldn't just give him one and leave it alone. What's the one great commandment? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

And then Jesus says, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). He ties them together with a kind of bidirectional spirituality reaches up and reaches out. If we forget to reach out, we are not authentically reaching up.

As the apostle John writes, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars" (1 John 4:20). John doesn't say you're unbalanced. He doesn't say you need to grow in your love of your brother and not just love God. No, he says *if you say, I love God, but you are not loving your brother or your sister, you are a liar*. The two need to come together. Don't say you love God and not love those around you who are reflecting God's image, his likeness.

It is as though Jesus knew the religious impulse would be to so prioritize God that we could use religion as an excuse not to love others around us.

Jesus said to love the Lord your God with everything you've got. That's your one mission on the planet. But without a bidirectional focus, we could use that love of God to excuse everything from blowing up ourselves and others, to torturing

people, to burning heretics at the stake, to launching into wars not only against other religions but other tribes within our own religion.

There's so much anti-Christ behaviour we can participate in in the name of the love of God if that's all we focus on.

And not just violent behaviour. We could focus on God so much that we ignore those around us.

How could you argue with more time with God? More time in meditation, more time in prayer, more time in personal study; it just seems so holy. But Jesus says, *I won't let you get away with that. You're going to love God and you're going to love your neighbour as yourself and if you don't do the one, you're a liar about the other*.

Beyond the ethic of a rock

My daughters attended a day camp that included children with mental disabilities.

As I dropped off my girls in the morning

"We steward God's grace to one another. God has given you someone else's grace—and given them your grace."

and picked them up in the afternoon, I used this summer camp experience to reinforce what it means to love in the way Jesus says to love.

I told my daughters, "I want you to go there and initiative love. Love is not just not doing bad things, love takes the initiative to do good things to others."

I tried to explain this to them in a way they could understand. They said, "Oh yeah, we're polite."

It's more than being polite, I told them. It's not just about being nice. Love goes beyond that.

They said, "Well, we won't say anything bad."

It's not about not being bad, it's about doing good. It's about seeing the person sitting on the outside by themselves and initiating kindness to them. It's *agape*, a Greek word meaning the choice to relate to someone as valuable.

I think that's why kindness is in the fruit of the Spirit, not niceness. Niceness is *not* doing rude things, but kindness initiates. I gave them an illustration. When we got out of the car, there was a big rock. "Is that rock loving anyone?" I asked them. "No, rocks don't love," they answered. "But is it doing

anything wrong to anyone?" I persisted. They got it. The rock isn't being rude or unkind, it's not hurting anyone's feelings, it's just sitting there. Rocks don't do anything bad; they just don't do anything good.

That summer we decided on our Cavey family motto: "Rock on." Go beyond the ethic of a rock. This is the love we see in the fruit of the Spirit.

This is what Anabaptists has been teaching me in the last few years.

A new commandment

It's not enough to just *not* be bad; to love is to prioritize the care of those around us. This becomes our worship to God so much so that in the New Testament, we find the apostles do a fascinating thing. Remember that bidirectional spirituality?

Just before Galatians 5 lists the fruit of the Spirit, the apostle Paul writes: "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment" (5:14). A single commandment. And then he lists the second commandment: love your neighbour as yourself.

Didn't Jesus say the law and the prophets hang on these two commands? Paul goes straight for the second. He does the same thing in Romans 13:8: "For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." Peter does the same in 1 Peter 4:8: "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins." James, the brother of Jesus, calls it "the royal law" (James 2:8).

We find no instance in the rest of the New Testament of the apostles quoting the bidirectional law. What makes them think they had the right to edit Jesus? When Jesus said these words, he was speaking to one who was not yet a disciple, someone who needed the challenge to come to God first.

But to his disciples, to those who have said, "I love God and I am willing to give up whatever it takes to follow him," Jesus says, *Now here's how you will do that. Your life will be about loving others as you love*



"Rock on" Fulfilling the bidirectional royal law



Morning Presentations

yourself. For the rest of the New Testament, that becomes the command that fulfills the law for us.

That's what Jesus says to his disciples in John 13. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." Not new as in the first time I said it, but new as in the first time it stands alone. He says to his disciples, *don't work out your love for God as a separate thing. You will work out your love for God by obeying this new command: love one another.* Jesus says the same thing in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

The resurrected Jesus says to Peter, *do you love me, Peter? Do you really? Well, if so, feed my sheep* (John 21:17). This becomes the renewed emphasis of Christ.

Worship flows

The parable Jesus told of the sheep and the goats can be summarized by saying the way we love and worship and serve Jesus is by loving and serving those people around us in need. So, we do not parse out "this is worship and this is service," "this is worship and this is evangelism."

It's all worship. We worship when we sing, we worship when we pray, we worship when we leave this place and this conference is long over.

The worship just continues and flows and flows and flows as we relate to others around us. Our religion is not a thing we contain within a holy place and a holy space with a holy priesthood. Our religion is relationship. It's worked out in how we love those around us.

And so, my brothers and sisters, I would like to leave you with a final thought.

The church becomes a laboratory for us to experiment with what it means to love God by loving each other with likeminded people. Because when we leave the church and we try to love people outside the church, sometimes people understand and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they receive it as a gift from God and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they cheer for us and sometimes they mock. But the church can be a safe place where we can develop our skills at loving.

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10).

We are stewarding God's grace to one another. He trusts us with his grace apportioning it out to one another. What a privilege. What a responsibility.

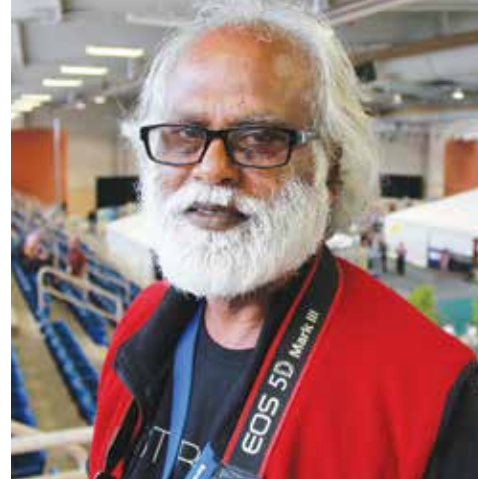
As a Western evangelical, I knew of the priesthood of all believers. I interpreted it to mean as a priest, I don't need anyone else, it's just me and God. I could be the priest of my own relationship with God.

But I think, for a Hebrew, to talk about the priesthood of all believers would not be as individuals connected to God, but as priests to one another. We confess our sins one to another. We steward God grace to one another. God has given you someone else's grace – and given them your grace. God wants to reveal truth to you and encourage you and nourish you with his grace. He could just do it individually but that would separate us.

Instead God gives it to someone else and says, *now go find it.* And he gives her grace to you and he says, *come together. Be stewards of my grace to one another* so that as we come together and learn to love and serve one another, we're experiencing more and more of the grace of God in our lives. What a privilege this is just to be the church.

So I encourage you to go get your grace. And go and give your grace. Through this giving and receiving of grace, we will develop our ability to love and to love well.

And so with these words, I close: "rock on."



Ray Dirks



Heike Martin



Heike Martin



Jonathan Charles

Clockwise from top right: Photographer Rufus Gurugulla from India. Assembly is a family event. Darnell Barkman (r) made highlight videos at Assembly for friends at home. Talking across cultures and generations.



Kazutomo Ray Epp

Hippolyto Tshimanga is director of ministry in Africa, Europe and Latin America for Mennonite Church Canada.

Mission Commission**The church must be about holistic mission**

Matthew 15:32
Luke 10:2
Matthew 28:19-20

This is a feeling of uneasiness regarding "mission" within the churches in the Western world. What should we do: evangelism or service? Yet, the world still asks us that we give the reason for the hope that abides in us. As the church of God, we have no other reason than the one given to us by Jesus of Nazareth.

The Gospels give testimony that Jesus went from village to village proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' verbal proclamation of the good news was always matched with care for people's moral and physical needs. There is no good reason for the mission of the church to be carried out differently, because Jesus is the head of the church.

Evangelization and service are both part of the church work of salvation.

Jesus began his proclamation saying, "Repent!" – change allegiance and totally return to God as the centre of all our values.

Even today, Jesus' church needs a change of mind, so that we may see this world as Jesus saw it.

In the image of the compassionate God who sent him, Jesus fed the hungry (Matthew 15:32) and he proclaimed the good news to the crowds, made disciples and entrusted them with a mission: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are

few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest (Luke 10:2).

It is because of that very compassion that Jesus sent his church to make disciples of all nations. And he promised to accompany the church in this task to the end (Mark 16:15-16).

Mission was in Jesus' DNA and mission is in church's DNA. There can't be a church without mission. We must do mission, and we must do it Jesus' way, pledging our obedience to God alone, and denouncing any other principality or power that frightens human lives.

Brothers and sisters, do not take lightly the Great Commission. Do not water down Jesus' command, and do not replace his last command to his church with your individual theological inclinations.

At the example of our Lord and Master, let us preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the full, speaking the Word and serving the world.

If we do not enthuse ourselves with the Great Commission, in its double sense of evangelism and service, we may cease to be a church. A church cannot choose whether or not to do mission; the church is missional by nature.

Young Anabaptists (YABs)**Giving and receiving in the mission of the global church: A concrete action**

Matthew 10:7-8
Matthew 25:34-40

Mission is holistic; evangelization is comprehensive. The Good News must be proclaimed regarding all areas. God's Kingdom will not be complete until each aspect of human suffering is healed, reconciled and transformed.

The Kingdom of God is here and now: providing a spiritual, material, social, economic response to the world (Mark 1:15). The call is based in action: from "chair" theology to "road" theology.

Our practice must embody the teachings of Jesus: a lifestyle (ethics-practice) that includes a renewal of the mind (*doxa*). Matthew 10:7-8 is a key text: give without receiving anything in return. Are we transformed by our own need? Does our mission become incarnate or do we come as if we owned the truth, imposing programs, objectives, structures, budgets?

It is precisely among those who force us to make a paradigm shift (who compel us return to the gospel) that revival comes. Jesus didn't come to the healthy but to the sick. We accompany those who are like sheep without a shepherd. As a Church, we must love those no one wants to love, those who have lost hope.

Then our transformed lives will begin to break into a violent system as a visible sign of a new humanity, a proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The grace that was bestowed on us vertically is the same grace we must bestow on others horizontally, even on those who don't want to love us.

The Lord also summons our creativity to make mission concrete: perhaps breaking all those institutional barriers, going beyond agencies and programs, not defining



Merie Good

Marc Pasqués was born and raised in Barcelona, Spain, then moved to Australia as a young adult where he connects values with marketing decisions. Marc was a member of MWC's YABs committee. Rodrigo Pedroza is a writer and illustrator of children's stories and fantasy, Rodrigo also serves as pastor in Mexico and a member of the conflict resolution team in his conference and was a member of MWC's YABs committee.

mission in terms of plans, budgets and numbers, but by an openness to the context of each place and person. Often money isn't even necessary where the Holy Spirit works through us.

Perhaps the only thing we have to do is just be able to listen. By listening we are honouring others, and at the same time, ourselves. We are transformed while offering the gospel of peace. It bears witness in a radical way, based on receptiveness, as when Jesus asked: What do you want me do for you?

What I found at PA 2015 and will take home with me

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Indonesia



Paulus Hartono

Being a part of the throngs at PA 2015 made Paulus Hartono of Indonesia reflect on his early life and how unlikely it is that he found his

way to this place.

Now a Mennonite pastor and highly active in peace work in Solo (Surakarta) Central Java, Indonesia, with its strong Muslim community, Hartono grew up in a Buddhist family.

"In elementary school, I learned about Islam. My friends went to the mosque, so I went, too, and eventually I became an imam. I realize now that I was feeling the call to be a pastor, but I didn't know Jesus."

When he became a Christian and was baptized in 1984, "I took the name 'Paulus.'"

Commitment to peace

From the beginning of his life as a pastor, Hartono's commitment has been clear. "We started our congregation in 1994 with 40 members and the vision of being a peace church."

Several North American Mennonite agencies gave him inspiration for putting his vision into practice. "In 1997, I learned about Mennonite Central Committee's relief, service, and development work. And at the same time, I was influenced by Eastern Mennonite Missions' cultivation of witness and global missions."

"In 2002, I learned about Mennonite Disaster Service. In 2005, soon after the tsunami hit Indonesia, we started Indonesia MDS: Mennonite Diakonia Service. We combine witness, relief, development and conflict transformation in that work by our church."

"In 2007, I attended Eastern Mennonite University's Conflict Transformation and Trauma Healing trainings. We've adapted those ideas for Indonesia and combined them with our witness and development efforts."

Writing the gospel with our lives

"Now in 2015, we have two Mennonite churches in Solo, with a total of 400 members. Our Mennonite churches are actively helping to bring reconciliation between Muslims and Christians."

We have many relationships with our Muslim neighbours, including a radical Muslim group who are participating in a special class we're offering on conflict transformation and disaster relief.

"The President of Indonesia is right now seeking reconciliation with Papua, a part of our country where the Mennonites have a program for conflict transformation and trauma healing. He has asked our help in working with Papua in peaceful ways."

"I believe that the church must make relationships with Muslims so they can read the gospel from our lives."

Paulus led two workshops during PA 2015: "Walking in Tragedy: The Global Church in Disaster Response" and "Interfaith Peace Dialogue and Practice in Indonesia."

"Being here with many pastors and in this atmosphere of spirituality has given me much courage," Hartono reflected quietly.

Germany



Barbara Hege-Galle

Barbara Hege-Galle of Bammental, Germany, first attended a Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly in 1984 in Strasbourg, France,

where she led the children's program. But she was so tied up with her duties that she got only a small taste of the adult part of the global event.

"I decided to go to the next Assembly in 1990 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, so I could participate—and after that, I knew it would not be the last MWC Assembly for me!"

Since then, Hege-Galle has been part of MWC in many ways: as a member of the General Council, of the Deacons Commission, of the coordination committee of the Service Network, and now as a member of the Missions Commission.

In her day job, Hege-Galle is the executive director of Christliche Dienst, the Mennonite Voluntary Service program sponsored by the Mennonite churches in Germany. And she is on the leadership team of the Bammental Mennonite Church, where she is ordained as a lay preacher.

A view beyond congregations

Why does she not want to miss an MWC Assembly? "Because this global get-together gives us a view beyond the little space of a Mennonite congregation. This gathering motivates me."

"I got really inspired to focus on our Anabaptist specifics this time. Not because of any of our particular traditions, but because of what we believe. We have a strong sense of peace in Jesus. If Jesus gives people like Paulus Hartono strength and courage, we can each do more than just be part of a quiet, peaceful congregation."

"In my work, I now have partners in other countries – and I meet them here. We in Germany are working with these sisters and brothers as I assign 18-20-year-olds to service projects in their countries."

Communal spirituality

What will Hege-Galle take home with her from PA 2015? "When I have a sermon to give, my experiences here will be part of it in some way. I'm not sure how yet. We have teachings in our congregation, and this will be part of them, too."

"One of our leaders is very deeply committed to practicing and teaching meditation, with a focus on what God is telling you. But some say that's too individualistic an approach, that we need something more communal."

"Here at PA 2015, I'm beginning to glimpse some of what we might need. It's just an idea at this point, and not fully formed. I like this emphasis on meditation, but it's not the only way of spirituality. I was reminded of that here."



Kazutomo Ray Epp

Zimbabwe



Mthokozisi Ncube and Morgen Moyo

Two Brethren in Christ high school administrators from Zimbabwe were first-time MWC Assembly-goers at PA 2015.



Mthokozisi Ncube, from the Eiluphileni Bible School, came for "fellowship and to learn what others are doing. I'm not only Zimbabwean," he commented.

"I'm an Anabaptist and part of an international family. I wanted to sit down with my brothers and sisters and learn about their experiences and how God is working in their lives."

"The Friendship Groups [which met every day following the morning worship service] are a good way to learn to know people. We've made friends. We've exchanged email addresses. We're hoping to extend this fellowship."

"I've been encouraged to become more involved in mission, and to be at peace with myself and my family, the people I live with. That's what I'm taking home."

"Oh, and I've been reminded that doubt is not always negative. It can be healthy." [Walking in doubt and conviction was the theme on 22 July 2015.]

Interacting and learning

Morgen Moyo is the principal of Mtshabezi High School. He's been deeply blessed by the singing at PA 2015. "I've had a desire to find out how other people worship. I want to learn from them. I've had that opportunity here in our Friendship Group. I'm interacting and learning."

Said Ncube, "And I have really appreciated the young speakers during the morning and evening worship services. We will take that idea home."

Oneness of spirit

"I discovered something else. When we walked the streets in Harrisburg, no one greeted us. But whenever we walked into the dining area at PA 2015, people always looked up, smiled and welcomed us. Always. I never felt different. There is a oneness here."

"In fact, one thing I haven't liked is walking into the restrooms here at the Farm Show Complex and seeing myself in the big mirrors. Then I see that I *am* different. I hadn't felt it otherwise!"

Celebrate differences

Moyo has a suggestion for future Assemblies. "Why not offer food from different cultures throughout the week? On Africa Day have African food, and so on. It might be hard to do, but why not?!"

"There's been lots of good planning and organization for this event. We especially like the lack of emphasis on glamour." But then the world's inequities surfaced for Ncube as he thought of returning to the realities of home. "Of course, emails often don't reach us. Not all communication gets through. Out in the countryside, it's hard to get messages. We hope our new friendships and connections endure anyway."

United States



Todd Friesen

Todd Friesen is pastor of East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA. A month after PA 2015, he reflected on the experience of

attending the Assembly for a full week.

"What would our churches – and our youth – be like without these glimpses of the global body of Christ, and the experience of being part of something much larger than just our local congregation?"

"A week like this breaks our provincialism and our sense of American exceptionalism. This event is kind of an immunization against those attitudes, although we're still susceptible to them."

Impact on youth

"We can't minimize the huge formational impact of these Assemblies on our young people. I attended the Assembly in Strasbourg in 1984 as a 20-year-old. The singing and worship left a major impression on me. I am so grateful that our congregation made the investment to have our youth group participate in PA 2015. It was such a positive experience for them."

A brush with eternal realities

"I love how we travelled from continent to continent through the morning and evening worship services. Heaven will be more rich



Jonathan Charles

and more diverse than we imagine. We got brushed by eternal realities through this experience with the global church."

"For those of us who went to Kansas City [site of the 2015 Mennonite Church USA Assembly], too, why did PA 2015 feel so different? At PA 2015, the focus was on worship, our shared stories, fellowship, and service. We were there simply to be together around our centre in Christ."

"And I learned that in the middle of our great diversity, it's probably best to start by worshipping God together, serving others and telling our stories rather than focusing on our differences or debating the things we disagree about."

Ongoing echoes in the mind

"The voices of the young speakers in the morning worship services will stay with me. "I heard new and rich insights into particular passages of Scripture."

"We were so blessed to welcome international guests into our congregation on Sunday, the final day of PA 2015. Then we all—including those who hadn't attended Assembly Gathered—could experience that every believer has precious insights to share and serious blind spots to overcome."

An enduring gift

"My fellowship with these global believers has made them my spiritual and emotional conversation partners, even though I'm not talking with them. I often have a sense of what they think, of what they would say or do, and I can draw upon that."

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference. Photos of Paulus, Barbara, Mthokozisi and Morgen by Merle Good. Photo of Todd Friesen by Marilyn High.

“Nothing that I am doing am I doing by myself”



Rebecca Osiro of Kenya new vice president of Mennonite World Conference

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Rebecca Osiro of Nairobi, Kenya, steps into her new role as vice president of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), with a life of experiences that has tested her faith and taught her wisdom.

Rebecca was the first woman to be ordained in the Kenya Mennonite Church (in August 2008), but her interest in the church stretches back to her childhood.

Her father was a Mennonite church leader, and Rebecca remembers helping to carry food to fellowship events and going with him as he visited church members and neighbours. “The dominant church was Anglican, but many of the families in our area were unable to pay their tithes to the church. So when there was a death in those families, the church wouldn’t do the funeral.

“Because my dad visited widely, offering pastoral care, the families often asked him to have the service and burial. I liked going

along, comforting, singing and making strong tea.

“The simplicity of visiting, of listening, of being welcoming and open drew people to our church. And it drew me. When I was in my third and fourth years of high school, I’d spend Saturday afternoons doing evangelism out in the open and fellowshiping with all who came.”

Rebecca’s mother made a special point of introducing her to the Bible and the songs of the church. Why she got that kind of attention from her mother still mystifies Rebecca.

“I was her third daughter, and not the last of her 10 children. But she told me she gave me to God as her tithe before I was born. When I learned to read, she gave me a Bible. She’d tell me a Bible story as we worked together, or she’d suggest a passage or verse for me to read. Then she’d come up with a hymn that fit. In that way, she integrated me—and my siblings—into the church.”

Rebecca may have had strong coaching from both parents, but when she was ready to get married, she insisted on independence. “Matchmaking was the order of the day, often by an aunt. But I chose my own spouse. His church and mine often competed informally in singing and fundraising!”

Rebecca and Joash J. Osiro were married in 1981. They are the parents of five grown children. Joash is a bishop in the Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC).

To be ordained, or not?

Rebecca did not crusade to be ordained. But the matter of women’s ordination had been on her mind for quite a while.

“As I was growing up, I saw women standing strong. They would say to my dad, ‘We need a church.’ A church would begin, and soon it was time for a leader, so they’d look for a man. They’d ordain someone who didn’t have a vision – and the church would die!

“When I was still in high school, I’d ask my dad, ‘What does the Mennonite church say about women being pastors?’

“My dad always supported the ordination of women and was the first bishop in Kenya to ordain a woman (in 1994), amid great controversy. Fortunately he lived to see me be ordained when I was 49 years old. I was so blessed to have his support.

“At one point, I thought maybe the idea of ordaining me should just be dropped because of all the stir it was creating. I didn’t feel the need of it strongly, but I knew it was important for other women who were also leaders to have their authority recognized.” Today Rebecca pastors the Eastleigh Fellowship in Nairobi. “We have 40–70 attendees at our weekly services in a space owned by the KMC, which we may use

from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm on Sundays. The neighbourhood is lower-middle class, international and becoming somewhat gentrified. A strong majority are Muslim radicals. “Our attendees are indigenous, and many work for the local merchants who often won’t let them have off to attend church functions.”

Solidarity through choir practice

Eastleigh Fellowship had prepared to send part of their group to PA 2015 as members of the KMC Choir, which was scheduled to perform at the event. But when only five from the entire choir were granted visas (including Rebecca and her son, but not her daughter), there was great disappointment.

“We had been meeting in our home to practice the music because we don’t have access to our church’s space outside of our worship hours. People would come straight from work, and some would spend the night with us because they had no other place to stay.

“Some women from our church were locked out of their homes by their husbands because choir practice ran late into the evening. But they wanted to participate because it’s only through singing that they get to express their solidarity with each other.

“So when we got the word that most of their visas had been denied, I first thought I should stay home to stand with them. But then I realized that when I had the opportunity, I should go.”

Work for peace

To contribute to the family’s livelihood, Rebecca lectures twice a week about Islam in a Jesuit seminary. She has an MA in Islamic Studies from Kenya’s St. Paul’s University and has participated in research related to the Sharia Debates organized by Bayreuth University.



Only five members of Kenya Mennonite Choir were able to obtain visas to travel to the USA for PA 2015. Rebecca Osiro is second from right.



Servant leadership means waiting in line to register, for meals—an opportunity for fellowship, to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones.

Rebecca is involved too in helping survivors of female genital mutilation. “It’s a small organization, and we do our work in peace.” Because the practice is deeply rooted in tradition, the men who inflict the damage are often unprepared for the horror of the harm they do.

“When we meet with abusers who confess to having participated in this, they often say forthrightly that they will never do it again. We work quietly. We want to help them be restored, so we build relationships.”

“My life is full of failed plans!”

How does this woman manage her life with all of its responsibilities and demands?

“My life is full of failed plans!” Rebecca says as she laughs and throws her hands in the air. “We have a grandson who lives with us, and extended family are always in and out for varying lengths of time.”

MWC’s leaders stand in line to get their food!

Rebecca has been a member of MWC’s Faith and Life Commission, a position she will leave as she becomes vice president of the organization. She is convinced of the value and necessity of the global body.

“MWC’s genius is fellowship and networking. We share our stories. We come together and find that we are one.

“We find strength beyond class, beyond status. MWC gives me courage. I feel I’m in the right place. Here at the Assembly, when I see MWC leaders, pastors and other church leaders standing and waiting in line to get their meals along with everyone else, I am so touched. In many other settings, they’d be brought their food rather than needing to wait in a queue!

“When I go home and see women living in paper houses, often over sewage, and they make me strong tea (probably having borrowed money to buy the tea), I am deeply moved.

“Sometimes I feel weak. Am I really on the right track? But nothing that I am doing am I doing by myself.

“I remember my mother saying, ‘Love your enemies.’ I think that is something God is doing inside me. I am not perfect. I do get irritated.

“But I find that with time, people who have said hard things, who have been against things in the church that seem important, those harsh differences often are taken care of—or at least no longer seem to stand between us.”

This woman has much to bring to the leadership of Mennonite World Conference.

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference.

More united than ever before



Merle Good

Alfred Neufeld, chair of MWC's Faith and Life Commission, reflects on the state of the global Mennonite faith community

by **Phyllis Pellman Good**

Alfred Neufeld, theologian, historian and generally insightful philosopher, reads on two tracks these days: "Proceedings" from past Mennonite World Conference Assemblies and social media.

Neufeld, of Asuncion, Paraguay, is on a year's sabbatical from his administrative duties as president of the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay, spending his time in Regensburg, Germany.

He's reading the "big books of Proceedings," produced after the first 10 Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assemblies (held between 1925 and 1978) to discover the big issues surrounding each of those events.

And he reads social media attentively, especially the theological expositions by

"neo-Calvinist preachers," as he calls them, who, he observes, lots of Mennonite young people are currently following.

Neufeld, who chairs MWC's Faith and Life Commission, recently addressed the General Council of Mennonite World Conference in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, as part of the 16th MWC Assembly, PA 2015. He spoke about "How Have We Dealt with Conflict in the Past?" He finds the subject of high interest to Mennonites in many places who wonder whether splitting and fragmenting will continue to be part of their futures.

"As I study the history of our Anabaptist fraternity and admire the lives of the founding fathers and mothers of Mennonite World Conference, I discover much wisdom in their way of dealing with conflict and holding the family together," says Neufeld.

While none of the major historic conflicts or tensions has completely gone away, Neufeld says, "I am encouraged. The global family today is probably more united than ever before, even though the challenge to do this with 100 Mennonite cultures is far bigger than it was with a quite homogeneous group 90 years ago."

Current struggles in the global family

And yet, Neufeld notes reasons to stay watchful and in meaningful support of each other throughout our global fellowship. "Here are the things I hear stirring that need attention:

"The new cruel actions of Islamic terrorism are **a critical test for the quality of Mennonite peace convictions based on the gospel.**

Who should our leaders be and who will shape our theology?

"In Paraguay, Germany, and parts of Canada (the places in the world that I know best) 60 percent of our young people are getting their theological inspiration from several North American neo-Calvinists who have powerful social media presences.

"These motivated young people aren't looking for cheap, right-wing stuff. They want straight, hard, biblical wisdom. But they're listening to voices who are strongly opposed to women in leadership and who say that the spiritual ethic of nonresistance is a compromised way to live.

"Not only do I see this as seriously confusing to our young people, it may also undercut our women pastors in countries where they don't have a lot of institutional support.

"These threats to our Anabaptist identity markers call for very wise and strategic care."

What priorities determine where our money goes?

"Some want all our donations to go to missions and church plants.

"Should churches accept government money to do their work? If so, how much, or what percent of the whole for particular projects?"

"Those with mission interests sometimes ask if it's appropriate for service agencies and networks or our schools to accept this 'easy' money when missions don't get that kind of funding.

"As a church, we renounced state sponsorship 500 years ago. That was at the heart of Anabaptism. How do we manage this today?"

"In my reading of the MWC Proceedings from the early gatherings, I'm reminded that this is a similar agenda as during the period of the Nazis, who offered to help bring Mennonites out of Russia."

Clearly, these early "global" gatherings of Mennonites included a measure of honesty about the issues besetting them.

Reasons for hope from the past

So why does Neufeld think the global Mennonite family has grown in numbers, strength, and support of each other?

"Definitely [through] the grace of God, the lordship of Jesus and the miraculous glue of the Holy Spirit present in all of our churches."

And, he adds, there might be at least three additional secrets:

1. "All along the way, God gave us very integrating and gifted leaders.
2. "Missions, and the growth of the young churches in the Global South.
3. "Christ-centred fellowship has helped us to focus on our common ground, to strengthen our shared convictions and to be gracious and patient with each other."

Some advice for churches in the Global South

This theologian/historian/philosopher from the Global South has a few suggestions for his sisters and brothers from the Southern Hemisphere about their role and place in the global faith family:

1. "The churches of the North need our support and understanding. But not our arrogance.
2. "This is not the moment for the churches of the South to make points against the churches of the North.
3. "Missions is a two-way road, with our older churches now being on the receiving end—which our churches in the South have been for a hundred years. Let's be attentive and humble."

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference.

Neufeld's Laboratory

While taking a sabbatical in the part of the world where the earliest MWC Assemblies were held, Neufeld is systematically studying and writing about these elements for each of the first 10 MWC Assemblies:

1. The world situation at the time.
2. Life in the whole Mennonite family at the time.
3. The overall Assembly program for that particular event.
4. The flavour of theology and spirituality, the conflicts, and any outcomes from the event.
5. Profiles of 10 leaders involved with each Assembly.



Merle Good

Alfred Neufeld (l) shares a laugh with **Rainer Burkhart** of Germany at MWC meetings in Ethiopia in 2010.

Neufeld's Observations about Mennonite Structure and Behaviour

1. "It might be one of the present-day miracles of the grace of God that our global, but very pluralistic, community has been able to find ways of staying united for such a long time. Our theology and our structure do not help. We have no global centre of church authority, since each national church is autonomous. We have no historic or present-day unified Confession of Faith.

2. "There were times in the past when older people and 'elders' held strong authority and were considered bearers of identity. Today, we all are aware that if we are not able to articulate our theology and identity in a relevant way for the emerging and digitalized generation, there will be no future for Mennonite World Conference." Nor for its member churches.

3. "Whenever persecution and marginalization have ended, Mennonites have identified quite strongly with their surrounding national culture. Separation from the world immediately becomes a complicated topic."

Anabaptist churches around the globe walk with God together in worship on

World Fellowship Sunday

24 January 2016

Resource material is available at: www.mwc-cmm.org/wfs
Invite your congregation to participate!

GYS sends a strong call to impact the world by sharing gifts

Anabaptist Youth from around the world learn and fellowship together at summit

by **Elina Ciptadi-Perkins**

The three-day Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Global Youth Summit (GYS) at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA, concluded Sunday, 19 July 2015, with a strong desire to impact the world by sharing their gifts.

Under the theme “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts,” 42 delegates and more than 400 participants discussed what they wanted to offer the global church. For three days, they gave gifts of presence, stewardship, service, empathy, creativity, knowledge, leadership, the ability to accept different opinions and use technology, among many others. They also spent considerable time discussing how they could use those for the kingdom of God.

“GYS delegates are already doing good work in their respective churches and communities,” said Rodrigo Pedroza, Latin American representative and chair of the Young Anabaptists (YABs) committee. “But after three days of cross-cultural interaction and exploration of biblical texts about gifts and callings, their confidence and understanding of sharing has grown.

“Now, their task is to share this message and energy,” Pedroza said.

“We hope that their church leaders will support them to grow in their spirituality and leadership capacity. The gifts from the different generations in the church will be a powerful testimony for the kingdom of God.”

This offering of gifts to the church was highly appreciated by the MWC Koinonia delegation consisting of MWC incoming president Nelson Kraybill, treasurer Ernst Bergen, and general secretary César García. “These gifts, surrendered into the hands of God, will transform the world.

“Never forget that while you need the wisdom of those older and more experienced than you, revolution starts with young people,” said García. “Jesus was young. So were Jesus’ disciples. And they turned the world upside down.”



The Global Youth Summit is characterized by occasions to share perspectives from a variety of different Anabaptist traditions around the world.

A time to reconnect with Anabaptist teachings

While delegates focused on discerning how to use their gifts for the global church, many activities offered participants opportunity to learn more about their Anabaptist roots and the global church.

“We want GYS to be a place where participants grow in spirituality, especially in their understanding of Anabaptist teachings and the global church,” said Lani Prunés, North American representative to the YABs committee.

“We do this by giving participants a lot of opportunities to hear and discuss how we live out our faith around the world.”

Workshop subjects ranged from interfaith and cross-cultural engagement, using social media without sacrificing authentic relationships and exchange programs, to case studies on living out peace and justice in different parts of the world.

Concerts, sports and games, a collaborative art project, drumming and dance showcases, and movie nights enhanced the cross-cultural experience.

The Young AnaBaptists hosted a booth at the Global Church Village where they provided Assembly Gathered participants with more information about the GYS experience.

Elina Ciptadi-Perkins is a copywriter and communications consultant. She is an Indonesian Mennonite who lives in Singapore with her family.



About the Global Youth Summit

Global Youth Summit is a Mennonite World Conference event for young adults aged 18 and older, occurring just before Assembly Gathered. During this three-day event, delegates chosen by their national conferences discuss in depth a particular topic relevant to the global church, while participants experience cross-cultural fellowship and reconnect with Anabaptist teachings.

About the Young AnaBaptist Committee

The MWC Young AnaBaptists Committee, called the YABs Committee, consists of five continental representatives chosen from the pool of most recent GYS delegates. This committee will work on building and strengthening connections among youth and young adult groups in the global family by utilizing social media and teaching materials. The YABs committee will also plan GYS 2021 in Indonesia.



GYS Highlights

Kenya



Wycliff Ochieng Otieno
GYS Delegate

The best thing about the GYS was meeting different people from around the globe and learning as a group, where

we could learn more than what we could as individuals. From what I learned about the theme “Called to Share: My Gifts, our Gifts,” I will work with young people in my home church so they realize that they have unique gifts and they can use them to build the kingdom of God by sharing what they was always a sense of respect and understanding.

Costa Rica



Marisabel Castillo
GYS Participant

The best thing about GYS for me was worshipping God together in different languages but one mind and one God, just as Jesus called us in Luke 10:27 to

love him with all our hearts, soul, strength and mind. Another important thing was to learn that as we get together and respond to God’s love, we could start seeing how much, not how little, we can do in our church and community.

Puerto Rico



Kelvin Jimenez
GYS Participant

During GYS, I remember one specific workshop in which we were sharing our challenges that our respective countries face. It was very

impactful to understand how diverse our settings and struggles are. Yet, we all seek guidance and wisdom from the same source, our God. We all base our hopes in Jesus and his message so that we can be light in the midst of darkness, community in the midst of segregation and love in the midst of the suffering of our world.

The Netherlands



Jantine Huisman
GYS Delegate

My most memorable aspect of the GYS were the conversations at the dining hall, where it was possible to join whichever table and meet people

from various countries and backgrounds. Sometimes these conversations turned from superficial getting to know each other to deep and open discussions on topics like divorce, homosexuality, remarriage, woman pastors and problems in our churches. Although we did not always agree, there was always a sense of respect and understanding.

I bring home a sense of shared problems, the feeling of not being the only young Mennonite in the world and optimism that there is a bright future for Mennonite churches all over the world.

GYS resulted in broadening my understanding of others and their convictions. I learned more in three days than I sometimes do during a month of my normal Dutch life. I already look forward to the next conference in six years!

Indonesia



Nita Purwidaningsih
GYS Delegate

We not only had a great fellowship during the event, but I learned to have a sense of belonging to the global family through praying

for other continents and supporting conscientious objectors in South Korea. GYS was a reminder for me that we need to take care of one another, and at a time when we can’t reach out to them directly, prayers will reach them.

Coming from the host country of the next Assembly, what do you want to say about Indonesia 2021?

Indonesia is a culturally rich archipelago with three Mennonite conferences, each distinctive in their way of worshipping God. At Indonesia 2021, you will see God’s beautiful works through nature and culture and the Anabaptist community in Indonesia will also be blessed by learning from you.

Compiled by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

Young Anabaptists: the present church

YABs take the stage at PA 2015 and set plans for their future

by Phyllis Pellman Good

They have a relatively short history, but their voices at PA 2015 were arresting and incisive. In fact, the Young Anabaptists' presentations throughout the morning worship at the Assembly caused some of the most spirited conversation at the Farm Show Complex (FSC) and were shared and discussed extensively on social media and beyond.

Known as YABs, these representatives of young people in Mennonite World Conference (MWC) member churches told the truth in unmistakably clear language. They asked strong questions. They were inspirational in their convictions.

This was not by chance. The members of the YABs Committee, who provide leadership for YABs activities and their mission, are a disciplined, seasoned group. Average age: 28½.

The YABs started in 2003 just before the MWC Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. More than 220 young people (ages 18-30+) from 28 countries gathered for the first Global Youth Summit (GYS), designed for fellowship and networking.

The get-together was so satisfying and so stretching for those who came that the young leaders asked that a second GYS be planned.

Elina Ciptadi-Perkins of Indonesia says, "While we were together in Bulawayo, we called for ongoing representation within MWC. We wanted to create a leadership group of five young people to initiate and implement our presence, with one representative each from Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America."

Ciptadi-Perkins, a delegate in 2003 from the GKMI national Mennonite conference in Indonesia, was appointed leader of the group, known then as the Amigos.

The third GYS, which more than 400 attended, was held at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, USA, 17-19 July 2015, just before the MWC Assembly in Harrisburg. Following the events, Ciptadi-Perkins, still a strong advocate for the YABs, reflected with two current members of the YABs leadership committee, Rodrigo



The YABs who planned GYS 2015 and completed their terms of service: Lana Prunés, Marc Pasqués, Sumana Basumata, Rodrigo Pedroza, Tigist Tesfaye Gelagel

Pedroza of Mexico and Marc Pasqués of Spain and Australia, about the YABs today. "We came more prepared than ever to the 2015 GYS. We had surveyed young adults in our individual countries. Their requests and wishes guided our worship, our seminars, our games and our down time while we were together," says Pedroza.

But the YABs also came prepared to the



Elina Ciptadi-Perkins of Indonesia, one of the first YABs leaders and still a strong advocate for them.

Assembly which followed at the FSC. "In Zimbabwe in 2003, we young people were given a verse to read in the main sessions.

In the past, people saw us youngs as 'creative' and 'full of energy... Maybe they could do some music.' But here at PA 2015, YABs had a key part in every single morning of the Assembly," says Ciptadi-Perkins.

"People now see we have the gift of discernment and critical thinking. We want to work together with our older sisters and brothers. Now it's becoming a dialogue," she says.

In some countries, YABs carry major church responsibilities. "Half of the ministers in Mexico are young people," says Pedroza, chair of the YABs Committee and one of the morning speakers at PA 2015. "The Mennonite churches in Mexico have abandoned bureaucracy, so young people are quite involved.

"In my country, Anabaptism's ideals have been lost generation by generation. Our older leaders haven't been teaching it, favouring instead a charismatic approach and Pentecostalism," says Pedroza. We're helping to put Anabaptism into practice and discovering its freshness."

Marc Pasqués was first invited to be a YABs delegate at the second GYS held in Paraguay in 2009. "Marc's national church conference was affirmed as a member of MWC just before the Assembly in Paraguay," remembers Ciptadi-Perkins. "In addition to Marc's evident skills, we invited him as encouragement to his conference to immediately be connected to the global church."

The YABs Committee includes one representative from each of the five continents, plus the MWC staff mentor. Members who completed a term at PA 2015 are Rodrigo Pedroza, Mexico; Tigist Tesfaye Gelagel, Ethiopia; Sumana Basumata, India; Marc Pasqués, Spain/Australia; Lana Prunés, US; and Ayub Omondi, Kenya, as mentor. YABs leaders have had unusual vision from the group's very beginning. "Our first team planted the seeds about how we young



people could contribute to MWC," says Ciptadi-Perkins.

"Our second team met with different official groups within MWC, explained who we are and what our gifts are, and asked for greater collaboration. This was our penetration stage. We wanted to go beyond token participation.

"Since Paraguay, we've been putting together our blueprint," says Ciptadi-Perkins.

"We've always had a strong desire to network and fellowship. Many of us had email, but back then, not many in the Global South had regular access. This past reality is changing now."

Pedroza continues, "Now we are threading those deep interests through the projects we are creating since they are a key part of our blueprint."

"Our projects are for the people we represent, but also for younger people who want to be connected. In smaller churches around the world, age distinctions aren't as important," says Tigist Gelagel. "We are designing specific activities for them to do, while at the same time, exposing them to each other's worlds. And through it all will



Young Anabaptists-to-be had their own programming during Assembly to explore the theme "walking with God" in sessions for children and teenagers.



Rodrigo Pedroza (l) and Marc Pasqués addressed the morning worship audience at PA 2015 on July 25, 2015.



we began, we needed a lot of 'envisioning.' We didn't have experience being part of multicultural groups and settings. We had tensions that could have been avoided had we been forewarned. Some MWC leaders helped us, but none was specifically assigned to give us this kind of guidance.

"So after the GYS in Paraguay, we decided to bring two members from the previous committee to the new team to talk about personal communication styles, and to help us understand each other better so we could avoid wasting time and energy in conflict.

"We also named a mentor from an earlier YABs Committee who would give us tools for organizing ourselves and our work. We have learned that the mentor role is very important."

"We do not want to be the future of the church anymore," says Pedroza emphatically. "We want to be the present church. They finally believe in us. They trust us. We need to use this opportunity to be listened to—wisely.

"We need to continue to be respectful of each other. We are different. We think differently. But we need each other. For example, we must keep our peace convictions alive, especially when we're at home and not together."

"My prayer," says Ciptadi-Perkins, "is that young people don't become complacent. Things could now seem easy since we were taken seriously at PA 2015. I hope this doesn't become 'expected without work and effort.'"

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA



Tigist Tesfaye Gelagel of Ethiopia (l) and Remilyn G. Mondez addressed the morning worship audience at PA 2015 on July 22 and 23, 2015 respectively.



Learning and loving the global Anabaptist family



The Rediger family from Bern, Switzerland, visited the Prince of Peace Mennonite Church in Anchorage. They reconnected with pastor John Thacker who stayed with the Redigers in Switzerland some years earlier while on sabbatical. This visit to Prince of Peace (pictured in their worship space, a Catholic retreat centre on a hillside) "helped connect us to the greater Mennonite church" and brought Assembly a little bit closer, says Prince of Peace member Jeff Chisholm.

The highlight was meeting fellow believers from many parts of the world—Brazil, Colombia, Manitoba: hearing their joys, their difficulties... what it means to follow Jesus in their home settings," says Assembly Scattered host Peter Clement.

Assembly Scattered at PA 2015 connected visitors and hosts in five locations: Alaska, the Eastern USA and Texas. It provided opportunity for Assembly participants to visit Mennonite World Conference churches and ministries in the host country before or after PA 2015 to strengthen and develop new friendships among Anabaptists from all over the globe.

Bruderhof families in Pennsylvania and New York hosted MWC visitors on the "Living Discipleship in Community" tour. Guests from Brazil, Otis and Betty Hoshstetler commended their host's hospitality, hard work and willingness to talk about their faith and practice. "Much singing, low profile leadership and talking to many members were highlights."

Conversations were mutually encouraging, said Clement. "[We] enjoyed working together, eating meals together, having a campfire tougher, and lots of singing – together."

Assembly Scattered



The Lancaster Mennonite Conference churches of Byerland, New Danville and Willow Street welcomed guests from France, Switzerland and Taiwan. They toured guests to historical sites in Lancaster County (home of the oldest Mennonite congregations in North America), Amish farms, and shared their discipleship, outreach, ecumenical activities and worship – and, of course, their hospitality.

The South Central Kansas tour was cancelled due to insufficient participation; however organizers went the extra mile to accommodate Rosemary Slater from Saskatoon. As she engaged the region's variety of Anabaptists groups past and present, she received "royal treatment" on this "experience of a lifetime."

From the Netherlands, Pieter Post, theologian and pastor, and Paul Steenbergen, sociologist and social worker, connected with San Antonio Mennonite Church and DOOR (Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection). "We were outstandingly informed [on migrant issues]," says Post, who was impressed with the warmth and dedication of volunteers.

"We are grateful to have chosen this [Assembly Scattered] program. It keeps us busy reflecting on what the power of faith and the meaning of the church can be," says Post.

The visitors weren't the only students. On "Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Anabaptist Engagement with Government in Washington, D.C.," guide Earl Zimmerman found it "especially valuable" though at times uncomfortable to hear a European perspective on U.S. society and global relations.

"We believe the calling of the church is precisely what we have seen," said Post.

— Karla Braun

News



The MWC Executive Committee beginning in 2015 (from left): Agus Setianto (Indonesia), César García (general secretary, Colombia), Paul Phinehas (India), Lisa Carr Pries (Canada), Rainer Burkart (Germany), Iris de Leon Hartshorn (USA), Jean-Paul Peterschmitt (France), Sandra Campos (Costa Rica), Steven Mang'ana (Tanzania), Thuma Hamakang'andu (Zambia), Nelson Kraybill (president, USA), Dario Ramirez (Paraguay), Ernst Bergen (treasurer, Paraguay). Missing from photo: Rebecca Osiro (vice-president, Kenya).

General Council fosters interdependence in global communion

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA – In four days of meetings just prior to the July 21-26 Mennonite World Conference Assembly, the General Council took additional steps in the journey toward interdependence in the global communion.

"During my ministry when planting a new church in Bogotá," commented César García, MWC general secretary, "I dreamt of the day my local congregation would mature enough to become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.... Some time later I heard that, in addition to reflecting the three 'selves,' a church reaches maturity when it is also 'self-theologizing', i.e. able to make its own theology."

"However," he added, "it took me many years to discover what is obvious in the process of development of every

living organism. True maturity is not reached when one is independent in all areas of life, but when one is capable of giving and receiving, of sharing with others what one has, as well as appreciating what others can bring to the table... in other words, when a person is interdependent."

The General Council meeting included around 120 representatives from MWC member churches around the world. About half of their time together involved sharing stories and reflecting together on themes of unity and diversity.

Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay examined lessons from four historical areas of conflict: the ethnic versus the missionary church; militarism; the emerging versus the "departing" generation; and revival pietism versus enlightenment liberalism.

Fernando Enns of Germany reflected on the difference between "cheap" and "costly" unity. "It is not we who create unity," he insisted, "but unity is created by participating in God's relation of love." The challenge, he added, is to determine the limits of diversity. The only basis

for divisions, he suggested, is whenever the lordship of Christ is questioned. On most other matters, he urged forbearance of differences.

Martin Junge, the general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, emphasized that the church is always both local and global. A focus on only the local (contextuality) without the global (catholicity) leads to provincialism, he declared. And a focus on the global without the local leads to imperialism.

General Council members shared stories from Ukraine, Zimbabwe, Panama, Angola, Venezuela, India, South Korea and other countries. A common theme was an expression of appreciation for prayers and expressions of solidarity from other MWC member churches.

In their business sessions, the General Council sought to strengthen the organizational structure that make global relationships possible.

According to García, MWC wants "to develop a global

structure that, like the skeleton of a living organism, facilitating the growth and development of this interdependent being we call MWC without drowning it with excessive institutionalization.... The structure that MWC has been developing seeks to avoid the temptation of being rigid and exactly the same in every local context. We seek to be sensitive to the reality of our congregations in each region, molding ourselves according to the different realities our community faces."

Each of the four MWC commissions—Faith and Life, Mission, Peace, Deacons—which have been in place for only the past six years, reported on their vision and work which included a wide range of involvements with only limited funds available to them.

The General Council also heard that relations with and among member churches have been enhanced through the work of regional representatives on each continent. As finances permit, plans call for the appointment of additional regional representatives in Africa and Latin America.

To fund the work of MWC, each member church is asked for a "fair share" contribution based on the "purchasing power parity" of each country. All contributions from individuals and congregations of MWC member churches count toward their fair share.

In an evening gathering, the General Council expressed appreciation for Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe, who is completing his six year term as the MWC president at this Assembly. The incoming president, Nelson Kraybill of the United States, began his term as president immediately following the Assembly. In its deliberations, the General Council also elected Rebecca Osiro of Kenya as MWC vice-president, to succeed Janet Plenert of Canada.

— MWC release by Ron Rempel

Changes in MWC communication team

Bogotá, Colombia –

The Mennonite World Conference communication team is changing with new appointments and transitions in three staff positions.

In mid-July 2015, Karla Braun of Canada began a half-time position as editor and writer. She serves as editor of *Courier/Correo/Courier* and also as a writer and editor of other MWC material.

Braun has been associate editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for the past seven years. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree in English with a concentration in linguistics as well as selected graduate courses in theological studies.

Braun succeeds Devin Manzullo-Thomas of the USA, who has served as MWC editor and writer since January 2013. He has been appointed to a full-time role at Messiah College, a Brethren in Christ-affiliated school in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and will begin PhD studies in September.

On 1 September 2015, Kristina Toews of Colombia will assume the responsibilities of chief communications officer, a role that includes overseeing MWC's communication strategy and coordinating all print and electronic communications. She will succeed Ron Rempel of Canada, who is retiring after serving in this position since January 2012.

Toews, originally from Abbotsford, British Columbia, has lived in Bogotá, Colombia and has served as MWC's web communications worker since February 2013. In this position, she has initiated and led MWC's growing social media strategy through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Toews also holds an undergraduate degree in Biblical Studies.



Karla Braun
editor and writer

Replacing Toews in managing MWC's web and social media presence is Aarón González of Costa Rica. He served most recently on the MWC Assembly staff in Akron, Pennsylvania, USA. In his new position, González will work from the MWC office in Bogotá.

González has served in his home congregation of Buenas Nuevas Mennonite Church in Costa Rica, and with Mennonite Central Committee and MWC in the YAMEN! Program in Cambodia.

"Communication and community are related words not only in their common root but in the impact that they have in the human being," commented MWC general secretary César García.

Without communication there is no possibility of sharing our joys and sorrows, finding hope in the midst of suffering, or building a global community. This is a reason why communication is more than just a career or a department in an institution. It is a ministry. It is a very important service for our Anabaptist global family of faith.

García added, "I want to express my gratitude to Devin and Ron for the ministry that



Kristina Toews
chief communications officer

they developed in MWC. Communications have been crucial during the last years in our global family. Under Ron's leadership, MWC communications advanced into new stages and reached the maturity that we need in order to keep growing and facilitating good means of communication among our members. We pray for God's guidance and blessings for these leaders and the new stages that they have started in their lives."

— MWC release

Departing staff and volunteers recognized at dinner event

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA

At a dinner event immediately following the 21-26 July 2015 Assembly, Mennonite World Conference general secretary César García expressed appreciation to a number of staff members who are ending their work involvement with MWC.

Merle and Phyllis Good were recognized for their service as communication consultants and fundraisers. Over the past 31 years—since the 1984 Strasbourg Assembly—they volunteered in a number of areas: writing articles, taking photos, editing *Courier/Correo/Courier*, developing the



Aarón González
web and social media manager

Anabaptist Shelf, publishing and promoting the *Global History* series, helping with social media and marketing, raising funds for both the core and Assembly budgets and advising on overall strategy. During some of those years, Phyllis also served on the General Council and the Executive Committee.

Eleanor Miller was recognized for 25 years of service. She served as a volunteer in the MWC Strasbourg office from 1990-1997, assisting in the planning of Executive Committee and General Council meetings and also the 1997 Assembly in India. From 1997-2015, she served as administrative assistant and was also a member of the communication team until 2014. In addition, from 2003 to 2015 she was responsible for collecting all national church information and statistics for the MWC global census of Anabaptist-related churches.

Tim Lind was recognized for several key roles with MWC. From 1997-2003, he and Pakisa Tshimika worked on a *Global Gift Sharing* project and co-authored *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith* (Good Books, 2003). From 2003-2014, Lind served as MWC's Church to Church Relations Coordinator. In the

months leading up to the 2015 Assembly, he assisted individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo in dealing with visa issues.

Other departing staff recognized at the dinner event were Robert J. Suderman, who served as Peace Commission secretary for the past six years, Devin Manzullo-Thomas, who served as editor of *Courier/Correo/Courier* since January 2013, and Ron Rempel, who served as chief communications officer since January 2012.

Also recognized were two commission chairs completing a six-year term: Richard Showalter (Mission) and Paulus Widjaja (Peace).

At the dinner event, chief international events officer Liesa Unger, national coordinator of Assembly 2015 Howard Good and North American representative Lynn Roth thanked the many paid and volunteer staff who helped with Assembly planning.

— MWC release

Leadership changes announced for three MWC commissions

Bogotá, Colombia –

In meetings prior to the 21-26 July Assembly, Mennonite World Conference announced changes in the leadership of three of its commissions.

"Transitions are a very important part of living organisms," commented MWC general secretary César García.

"Our human body, for example, needs to renew its cells in order to keep healthy. In the same way our MWC constitution provides specific terms for some leadership positions in order to help our global body stay healthy and renewed by new leadership and new vision. It is a blessing when leaders fulfill a stage in their service and are ready to move to new positions of service.

Joji Pantoja was appointed as chair of the Peace Commission. Joji and her husband Dann,

originally from Canada, are peace building missionaries in the Philippines. She succeeds Paulus Widjaja of Indonesia as chair.

Newly appointed as secretary of the Peace Commission is Andrew Suderman. Andrew and his wife Karen, originally from Canada, are providing leadership to an Anabaptist Network and Resource Centre in South Africa. He succeeds Robert J. Suderman as secretary of the commission.

Stanley Green of the United States was appointed as chair of the Mission Commission. Green is executive director of Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA. He succeeds Richard Showalter of the United States as chair. Rafael Zaracho of Paraguay continues as secretary of the commission.

Siaka Traoré of Burkina Faso was appointed as chair of the Deacons Commission. Traoré is president of *Église Évangélique Mennonite du Burkina Faso*. He succeeds Cynthia Peacock of India as chair. Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands continues as secretary of the commission.

Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay continues as chair of the Faith and Life Commission, and John Roth of the United States as secretary.

"I want to express my gratitude for the years of service that Paulus, Richard, and Cynthia did in a voluntary way as commission chairs and for the excellent work that Robert developed as Peace Commission secretary," noted César García. "These leaders contributed to the good health of our MWC body. They did so during their years of service and during this time of transition.

It is my prayer that the new leaders of our commissions will be encouraged and inspired by their predecessors in their global ministries."

— MWC release



Peace Commission: (l to r) Antonio González Fernández (Spain), García Domingos (Angola), Kenneth Hoke (USA), Joji Pantoja, chair (Philippines), Robert J. Suderman (Canada), Jenny Neme (Colombia), [missing] Andrew Suderman, secretary (South Africa)



Mission Commission: (l to r) Hermann Woelke (Uruguay), Rafael Zaracho, secretary (Paraguay), Agus Mayanto, vice-chair (Indonesia), Stanley Green, chair (USA), Kelbessa Demena (Ethiopia), Andi Santoso (Indonesia), Barbara Hege-Galle (Germany), John Fumana, vice-chair (DR Congo), [missing] Philip Okeyo (Kenya)



Deacons Commission: (l to r) Henk Stenvers, secretary (Netherlands), Siaka Traoré, chair (Burkina Faso), Hanna Soren (Nepal), Doug Sider (Canada), Gladys Siemens (Brazil), Jurg Braker (Switzerland), Enock Shamapani (Zambia), [missing] Elisabeth Kunjam (India)



Faith and Life Commission: (l to r) Chiou-Lang "Paulus" Pan (Taiwan), Wieteke van der Molen (Netherlands), Alfred Neufeld Friesen, chair (Paraguay), Valerie Rempel (USA), Hanspeter Jecker (Switzerland), Manjola Roul (India), John D. Roth, Secretary (USA), Tewodros Beyene (Ethiopia)



Kazutomo Ray Epp



Rolando Santiago



Ray Dirks

Jon Carlison

Jonathan Charles



Ray Dirks



John Eby

Artists who walk with God through gifts of painting and sculpture shared their work in an exhibit



Rhoda Shirk



Rhoda Shirk



Dania Ciptadi



John Eby



Jon Carlison



Jim Cheng

Volunteers translated news stories posted on pa2015.mwc-cmm.org into all three official MWC languages while interpreters relayed all the plenary sessions into Spanish, French and English and sign language.



Glenn Fretz



A Vision for Reconciliation

Introducing the new Mennonite World Conference president



Merle Good

Former *Courier* editor Devin Manzullo-Thomas asks new Mennonite World Conference president J. Nelson Kraybill about his call to Christian ministry, his roles in his home country and around the globe and his vision for the reconciling work of MWC.

How did you become interested in the life of the church?

Growing up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, my family was deeply involved in the mission of the church at the local level. Both of my parents gave tirelessly to the congregation, serving in many roles, from Sunday school teachers to janitors. My uncle Nevin served as a missionary in present-day Tanzania. The stories he told when he came home on furlough were my introduction to the global church. That sparked my interest in the worldwide body of Christ.

Can you describe your call to ministry?

My primary call is to pastoral ministry. But over the years, I have combined pastoral ministry with work in theological education and academia. It has been a rewarding journey!

Selected by a vote of the MWC General Council, J. Nelson Kraybill officially began a six-year term as president of MWC at the Assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he celebrated communion.

In what roles have you served over the years?

My studies took me to Goshen College, a Mennonite college in Indiana; Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey; and Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. Over the course of my ministry, I taught Bible at Summit Hills Mennonite Academy in San Juan, Puerto Rico, offered conflict mediation seminars while serving at the London (England) Mennonite Centre, and served as president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. I also pastored a small congregation in Vermont.

What is your current ministry?

After retiring from the seminary presidency, I returned to full-time pastoral ministry, unexpectedly, with my home church, Prairie Street Mennonite, a multi-racial congregation in the heart of Elkhart. The experience has been so life giving for me: shepherding, nurturing, and learning from one sustained community. I'm very glad to be serving in this role with these people.

How have you been involved in MWC up to this point?

In 2003, Mennonite Church USA asked me to serve as the North American representative to the MWC committee tasked with producing what became our seven Shared Convictions. I went to Zimbabwe to work with a group of scholars and pastors on reading and analyzing 34 confessional statements from various MWC constituencies. We distilled the core ideas that form our identity as a global faith family.

How did you come to be MWC president?

A few years ago, the search committee tasked with finding a successor for Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe called me to ask if I would allow my name to be considered for the role. At first, I resisted. As we had done before, my wife Ellen and I called together a group of Christians who knew us and knew our hearts for both the local and global church. We asked them to pray with us and help us to discern. Ultimately, they urged me to let my name stand, sensing that this new direction was God's will.

Day-to-day, what does the MWC president do?

My role is not management, it's governance. (We have a very capable chief executive officer in our general secretary, César García.) I'm strictly a volunteer who has the privilege of moderating the MWC Executive Committee and General Council, two groups that help us do the work of the global church. I'll meet with the other MWC officers—the vice-president and the treasurer—to do business: monthly (via Skype), face-to-face two or three times per year. Perhaps the best part of my role is my opportunity to visit MWC member churches around the world! My intention is to spend time visiting local churches in various countries, learning to know the leaders and hear their stories. Ultimately, I see my role with MWC as pastor, encourager: someone with ears and eyes open to the global church, and someone who helps foster the vision.

And what is your vision for MWC?

The core of our ministry is reconciliation. I want for myself and for the church to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. I want us to know the power of his resurrection, and to know that the energy for our global gatherings emanates from that core reality. But that reconciliation with God through Christ is only one part of the reconciliation equation. Mission is reconciling work that includes both the dimension of calling individuals to faith—to salvation, repentance, forgiveness, and regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit—and the dimension of nurturing and repairing relationships between people in the church, outside the church and within the global ecology. The biblical vision of God is to unite all things in Christ. As Anabaptists, we need to hold together individual conversion and peace and justice work. If we lose one aspect or the other, we lose all reason for our existence.

MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

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A monthly email alert with links to articles on the MWC website.

- English
- Spanish
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Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

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