

# Lendrum Grace Notes

# MENN NITES

## *a Global Family*



Photo by Chris Wiebe

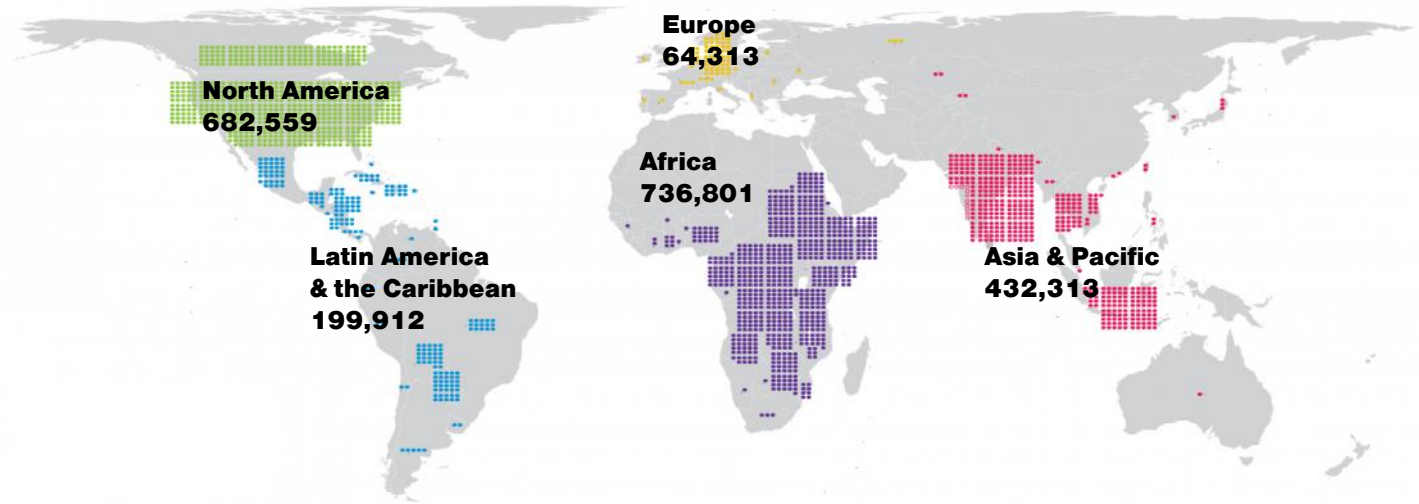
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# Mennonites Converge

Totals by continental region are:



by Tena Wiebe

**1925** Christian Neff, the pastor of the Weierhof Mennonite congregation in Germany, is considered the “father of the Mennonite World Conference”. As president of the South Germany Mennonites he issued the first call for a meeting. The first MWC was held to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anabaptism. Though not officially elected, he was the recognized leader of the first 3 conferences.

**1940** This conference was cancelled because of the war.

**1946** Christian Neff died in 1946. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) took over the MWC leadership.

**1948** MWC had simultaneous programs in Goshen, Indiana and North Newton, Kansas

**1962** Kitchener, Ontario. The first MWC Assembly to be held in Canada and up until then it was the largest assembly with over 12,000 registered. Rudy Wiebe attended as editor of the M.B.Herald.

**1967** Amsterdam, Netherlands. There is a growing non-western attendance. The Sunday morning sermon was presented by Afro-American Mennonite civil rights activist, Vincent Harding.

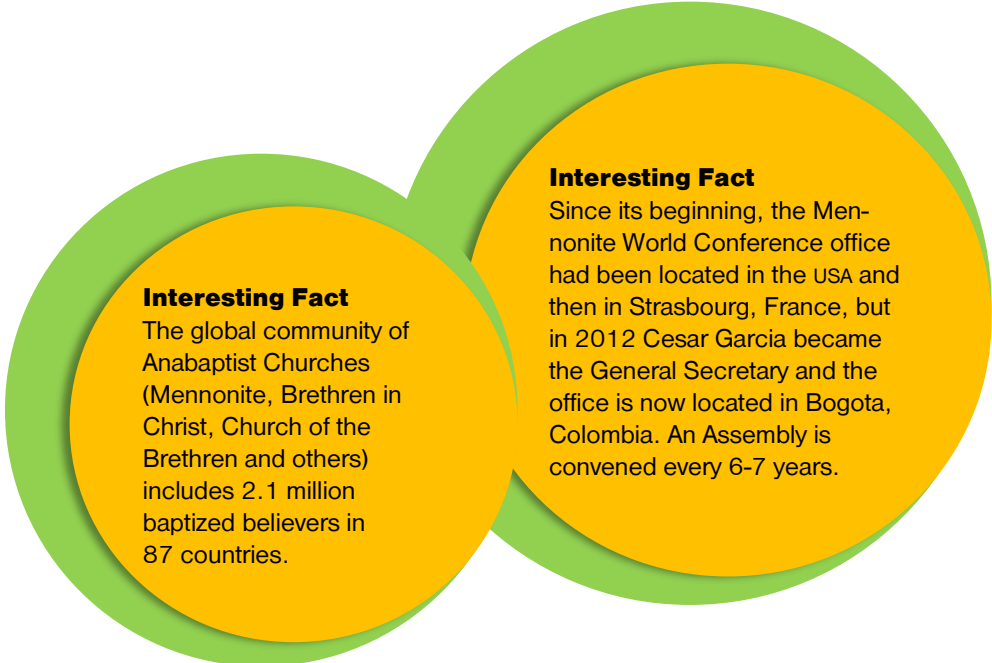
**1936** The 3<sup>rd</sup> MWC was the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Menno Simons’ conversion from Roman Catholicism.

**1930** The 2<sup>nd</sup> MWC was called to organize a cooperative effort to meet the need for aid to Mennonite refugees from Russia.

**1957** Karlsruhe, Germany. Theme: *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the World.*

**1952** Conference in Basel, Switzerland with 600 attending from Europe, North America, Indonesia (2) and Paraguay (1). The focus moved from historical celebration and concern for Mennonite families to deliberate themes focusing on theological issues.

**1972** Curitiba, Brazil. The first time it was held on a continent other than Europe and North America. It was controversial but had a broader balance from 5 continents.



**1984** Strasbourg, France. Lendrum MB Church choir of 67 singers performed Carol Dyck's cantata *Every Deliverance*. 70 nations were represented at the conference with a peak attendance of 8,000 on Sunday morning.

**1986** Began the publication of the MWC Courier in English, French and Spanish.

**2003** Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The 14<sup>th</sup> MWC was the first one held in Africa.

**2009** Asuncion, Paraguay. Attending from Lendrum were Ernie Wiens and Dave Hubert.

**2027** Likely Europe

**2021** Indonesia

**1997** Calcutta, India. Held in January (usually held in July or August).

**1990** Winnipeg, Manitoba. Largest MWC registration of about 13,000 (7,200 from Canada).

**1978** Wichita, Kansas. It had a larger attendance than previous assemblies and represented 48 nations. The first representatives from Russia attended. The executive position became full time.

**2015** Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA. Theme: *Walking With God*. Attending from Lendrum were: Carol Penner, Kevin Guenther Trautwein, Isaak Goertzen, Adrienne Wiebe, and Doug Zook. Also attending: former Lendrumite, Chris Wiebe, with his wife Jan and daughters, Anna and Sylvia.



# Plenary Sessions and Workshops

by Carol Penner

Every day we were at the World Conference, our plenary sessions together focussed on the theme of “Walking with God”; “Walking in Doubt and Conviction”, “Walking in Conflict and Reconciliation”, “Walking in Autonomy and Community”, “Walking in Receiving and Giving”. Each day a different commission of the World Conference had chosen a few speakers to address the theme. Speakers at a world conference generally, with a few exceptions, are people who have worked extensively in world conference settings, and have long years of global dialogue experience. Speakers of this sort tend to be very careful with their words. Challenging things were said about unity, about diversity, and about overcoming painful histories and sinful practices. Again and again we heard about the power of God to change us into a people who can walk together.

There were many fine speakers; I will tell you about two. On Friday night Wieteke vanderMolen, a preacher from Holland, spoke about autonomy and community. She focused on the tension between autonomy of the individual and the power of the community as we listen for God. She gave an extensive and careful reading of the Jacob story. And I am not exaggerating when I say that Wieteke kept 5,000 people spellbound as she took 20 minutes to retell a story that most of us knew very well. Listening for God and being together in community is like Jacob’s wrestling with the angel; even if we win, it leaves us slightly limping. As a preacher myself, I really

appreciated hearing fine preaching that inspired me not only with the ideas, but with the style of preaching.

Secondly, Remilyn Mondez, a young woman from the Philippines spoke on Thursday. Each day they gave the floor to a “Young Anabaptist”, so that we would hear the voice of someone under 30. I found that these young speakers tended to be the most poignant in their pleas for unity and the most pointed in their criticisms of the church. Remilyn told a painful story of a church split and how it affected her. She reminded the assembly that if you let personalities and power struggles dominate the church, young people will not stay in it.

Another significant part of the conference was the workshops. Every day there were a couple of dozen different workshops to choose from, on a wide variety of topics. I presented in a workshop on “Global Mennonite Women Building Peace”. Three women from Columbia, Pakistan and Africa, and myself, all shared on what it means to be a peacemaker in our context. It’s challenging to have a workshop where not everyone speaks the same language. My presentation time was cut in half, because the interpreter shared what I said in Spanish. And so there is a lag time in comprehension for many in your audience. It was even more difficult for the Pakistani speaker,

who had her presentation interpreted from Punjabi into English, and then from English into Spanish. Communicating across language barriers takes a long time!

One fascinating workshop was on peacemaking in the context of robotic warfare, a topic I knew almost nothing about. The speakers had worked in this field for many years in many parts of the world. They described how Artificial Intelligence is revolutionizing warfare. They also linked these technological advancements to mining practices that are endangering indigenous people around the world. I came away from the workshop with a reading list and a lot of questions.

Another interesting workshop reported on the Mennonite presence at the World Council of Churches gathering in South Korea in 2013. I learned how Mennonites have had a voice in shaping ecumenical dialogue, encouraging the world-wide body of churches to think about peace as central to the gospel message.

Every day I was given lots of food for thought; I am still digesting much of what I heard!



Eagerly participating in the 2015 MWC Children’s Program, were 281 children. On the right is Rudy & Tena’s granddaughter, Sylvia. Her parents, Chris Wiebe and Jan Schroeder were there from Ottawa. (photo by Jonathon Charles)

# Friendship Groups and Activities

by Kevin Guenther Trautwein



Friendship group (photo by Carol Penner)

There were so many great things about Mennonite World Conference. This was my first time going, and I really appreciated the worship sessions, especially the diversity. (I had no idea what Japanese worship was like!) But perhaps the most important reason I wanted to go to Mennonite World Conference was to meet and interact with Mennonites from around the world. Two of the best places to have conversations were in the friendship groups and the activities.

Every day, after the opening worship time, we were invited to join a friendship group. The first few times we met, the conversation was very cautious as we tried to get to know each other. We were given questions to discuss, which helped. But toward the end of the week the questions got our group thinking about a controversial topic. After the amazing worship all week, I was curious to see how our group (four Canadians and one Filipino) would handle this.

I was disappointed. You could almost see the relational barriers, that had been so cautiously breaking down, going right back up as the group sorted itself into theological camps.

There is no way that in 30 minutes or so, this theological issue was going to be resolved. But that didn't stop people from bringing out their favourite Bible verses and theologies, which I'm sure everyone had heard before. What could have been an opportunity to reaffirm the things we held in common, and commit to remaining in fellowship while holding on to our particular beliefs, by the end of the week had turned into a simmering "agree to disagree."

But friendship groups were just one part of the day. On the first full day of World Conference, I went on a hike on a section of the Appalachian trail. Most of us didn't know each other, and everyone was so focused on the footing that we were about halfway up the trail before I noticed

that no one was really talking. At one break, I finally struck up a conversation with a woman from the UK who works with the Anabaptist Network. It was great to talk with her, since I had read *The Naked Anabaptist* a few years ago. We talked about a number of topics, including the different ways that our countries remember war veterans, and the various responses that peace churches have given.

On the way down, I began a conversation with a seminary student from the USA. He, like me, was a late convert to the Anabaptist tradition, and we talked about our experiences. He had come from the Pentecostal tradition and sometimes missed the emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Though I don't come from the Pentecostal tradition, I could understand this feeling. He also recommended an author whom I will read. These were two uplifting moments of conversation and solidarity on the mountain.

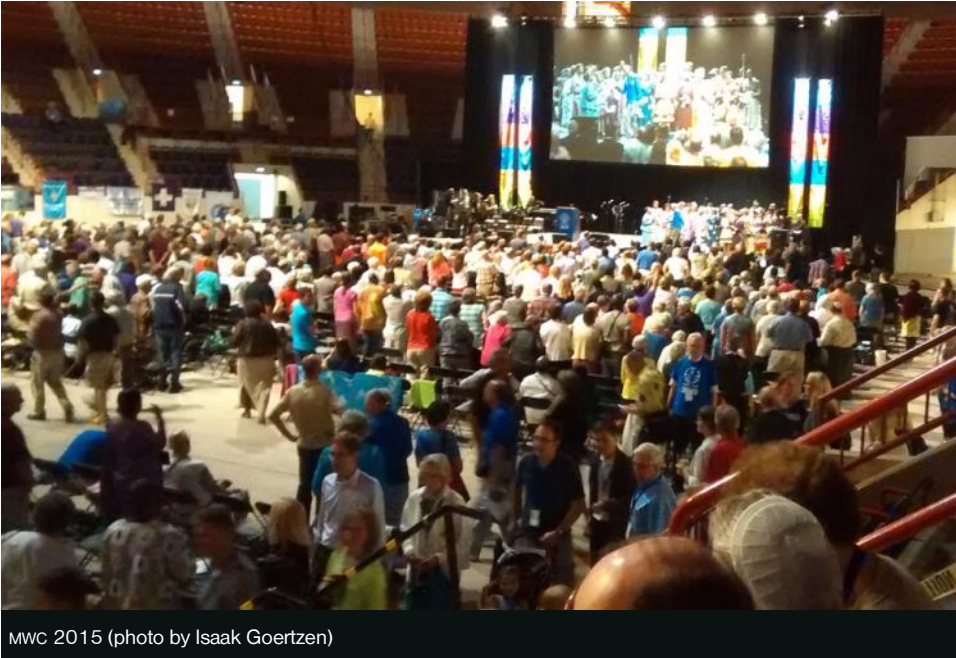
In my friendship group and in the activities I experienced two different kinds of conversation: guided and natural. Both had their merits, but the conversations that arose while we were doing things together naturally – on the bus back to the hotel, around the meals, and on the mountain – are where relationships and understanding were built. And for me that's what going to Mennonite World Conference was all about.

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, walk together.  
~An African proverb:



# A Bad Start, But I'd Go Again

by Isaak Goertzen, with Hilda Dueck



MWC 2015 (photo by Isaak Goertzen)

My flight left Edmonton shortly after 6 a.m. and flew to Toronto where I had to wait two hours. Then it was on to Philadelphia. We arrived around 4:00 PM: it was hot! I had to wait two hours for a ride to Harrisburg, and in the meantime, it was hot!

I found a water dispenser, bought a bottle and gave it to Claude Pratte, the director for “The Family Life Network”. But I couldn’t get a drink for myself. The dispenser swallowed up four dollars, but wouldn’t give me any water.

Finally, a bus arrived and took us to the Assembly site, the Farm Show Center in Harrisburg. We unloaded a few people and then the bus went to the hotel that had been booked for me, but they couldn’t find me in their computer. When I talked to the conference organizers, they told me that my reservation had been changed. I was to stay in a dorm at Messiah College.

The bus had already left, so I had to get a taxi and go back to the Farm

Show Center to take the bus to the College; another thirty minute drive. At the College I couldn’t find the office. I was sent to one place and another, and finally I found it. They had all my paperwork, and a key, but still - no water! And I hadn’t eaten since lunch! I found a fountain, and got a small bag of chips in a dispenser and that was my supper. By the time I got to my room, I was ready to go back home already. I finally got to bed at 11:30 PM.

I talked to a fellow from Holland, he was around eighty years old and he had an almost worse experience than I did regarding the travel.

But after that bad start it got better. The breakfasts at the College were good: bacon and scrambled eggs, juice and coffee, and sweet stuff. I found some friends from Paraguay also staying at the College.

Every day six or seven buses took us to the Assembly site and left us there for the day. If we wanted to go back to our rooms, we had to take a taxi. The Conference reminded me of Teacher’s Conventions I used to attend. The day would be fully booked. There was no

leisure time planned, so you had to make choices to miss sessions or workshops to get some down-time. There was a tent where people could relax or take a nap.

The worship singing was the highlight for me. It was my kind of music: the accompaniment wasn’t louder than the singing. There wasn’t a theme song, but each day featured music from a different continent. I was surprised when we sang “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring” by J.S. Bach; that was on the day music was from Europe.

My impression is that it was a good thing to have a world conference. I was sitting beside a Filipino guy while a woman speaker from the States spoke about adult baptism being one of the Anabaptist distinctives. He had no idea.

I talked to another guy from South Africa, and asked him, “What does it mean for you coming to a world conference like this?” And he said, “To recharge.” He was a pastor of a Mennonite church.

Especially for people from Africa and Asia, I noticed that it meant something to them, because they could see, “We are not alone.”

My room mate at the College was from Winnipeg. This was his first time at a world conference too. He’s a sports writer for the Free Press, and a deacon in his church. He said he wants to go to the next world conference six years from now. It will be in Indonesia. He is going to start saving money. I would go again too, if I have the chance.

# Serving as a Volunteer

by Doug Zook



Headset translation volunteers (photo by Sue Waterfield)

As part of my experience attending Mennonite World Conference 2015, I volunteered for about four hours each day as a headset distribution assistant. Under the capable, fun-loving, and encouraging leadership of Sue, from twelve to fifteen individuals provided headsets for individuals attending the morning and evening services.

I was a part of a group of volunteers who were from Africa, India, Central/South America, Europe and North America. For each service we loaned out close to six hundred headsets. The biggest contingent of borrowers were for Spanish-speaking individuals. We also had headsets for French, German, and Portuguese speakers as well as headsets for the hearing impaired.

After the first day of what seemed like unending complications, we developed an efficient method of distribution prior to the services and collection after the services. I enjoyed practicing my French with several people who, I am sure, were bemused

by my attempts, but ever gracious.

It was also enjoyable to develop a repartee with individuals as we became more familiar with each other with each passing day. Several people had a sense of humour, as those from Switzerland who asked for the “Swiss German” headsets, and those from Germany who wanted the “Deutsch” ones.

By far, the people borrowing the headsets were cooperative and pleasant, although there were the rare incidents where some people were a bit more challenging. One day while volunteering, I wore my Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) T-shirt and had two negative encounters: one was mostly humorous, the other much less so. Both individuals were Canadians. However throughout the rest of the day, I had several Canadians compliment me on the CBC T-shirt—even Cheryl Pauls (the President of Canadian Mennonite University) which helped to offset the earlier exceptions taken

to my T-shirt. There was also the odd person who would simply feel free to attempt to help themselves to a headset without regard for the volunteers standing in front of the trays of headsets.

Invariably there would be individuals who would return during the services because their headset wasn't working. Of course some of these problems were simple to repair while others required a complete exchange of the headset. We became adept at recognizing the look of an individual whose headset wasn't working properly and would respond with the requisite apology and encouragement to try another one.

The distribution prior to the services was orderly and relaxed, but after the services there was a frenzy of activity as people emerged en masse wanting to quickly return their headsets and leave the building. Keeping one's wits about them to follow the proper procedure to account for the headsets was no small task. The appreciation that the borrowers showed went a long way to making these rather frenetic times worthwhile.

Becoming acquainted with the various other volunteers through conversations, joking (there was a generous amount of humour among us) and working together made for an enriching experience. Our group was composed of a singer, social worker, veterinarian, students, teachers, and pastors. As a thank you to all of us, Sue, our intrepid leader, treated us to Whoopie Pies (a Pennsylvania Dutch treat) which seemed a most fitting ending to the five days of volunteering.

The golden way is to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family as one.

~ Mahatma Gandhi



# A Good and Uncomfortable Conversation

by Adrienne Wiebe

There was only one seat left at the table. I asked if I could sit there, and the others at the table welcomed me with smiles and greetings in a couple of different languages.

Finding a seat in the dining room at the Mennonite World Conference was sometimes a challenge. Feeding 6,000 people twice a day, takes some time and patience. There were long lines for the food, - really good food - and then the dining rooms were crowded and buzzed with the conversations, laughter, and exclamations as people connected with friends from around the world and made new friends.

This day, I ended up taking the last seat at the table with a group that turned out to be the musicians during the plenary services in the arena. The black gentleman next to me, introduced himself as Clyde Ferguson, Jr. He played the bass guitar in the musical ensemble.

"I am a blues musician and teacher in North Carolina," he told me, giving me his business card. He told me about his work organizing the blues music festival in his city, Lenoir, and preserving music that he originally learned from his father, a well-known blues musician, Clyde Ferguson, Sr.

This led to a fascinating discussion about music, and then negro spirituals. He told me the stories and meaning behind some of the songs, and how they had hidden messages. For example, "One more River to Cross" was about crossing the Ohio River on the way to the northern States in which slavery was illegal.

He was excited to hear that my last name was Wiebe and that I was from a Mennonite Brethren church. He is from a Mennonite Brethren church -

apparently the MB churches in North Carolina are the only MB churches in the USA that are east of the Mississippi River. The MB churches in North Carolina grew out of the work of Krimmer MB missionaries named Wiebe and Siemens, starting around 1900. These missionaries started an orphanage and established several Black American churches in North Carolina.

Our conversation continued to meander. Soon we were talking about what it was like having a Black President, and then about the ongoing racial violence in the USA, and particularly the tragedy of the shooting in the church in Charleston, South Carolina, which was still fresh on everyone's minds.

Our conversation was cruising along with nods of agreement, shared stories and questions, and a sense of connection on so many levels.

And then the rolling conversation came to a screeching halt.

The topic of guns came up. Clyde told me that the MB conference in the USA has been debating this - issues like whether members should be soldiers, and whether a person can defend their family with guns. Clyde thought there was no question that everyone should be able to carry a gun. "People need to defend themselves and their families. The bad guys have guns, why shouldn't the good guys?"

He used Old Testament passages to explain why he thought this. He quoted Jesus in Luke 22:35-36 "And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take

it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one."

All of a sudden, I did not know what to say. I couldn't nod and agree, or eagerly ask more questions. I was at a loss for how to respond. I am not Black. I don't live in a community where racial violence targets people from my ethnic group. I don't live in a country where people regularly carry guns. I do not believe that guns are the answer, but at the same time, I could not just assert a principle or belief and dismiss his perspective. I was quite silent in this part of the conversation. I tried to just listen to the voice of someone - a fellow Anabaptist Christian, an older black man, with a history that I do not know, telling me about his experience and beliefs.

It was a gift - one of many I received while at the MWC in conversations with people from around the world.

A Canadian colleague of mine told me that he didn't really believe in the idea of the "global church." Yet it seems to me, that the beauty of coming together as the "global church" is that it connects us with others, and the diversity of people and ideas keeps us real. We can't just stay in a small group with others who think and believe exactly the same things as we do. We are part of a network of people spread around the world. We matter to each other. And we listen carefully and learn from each other; we try to understand each others experiences and convictions. We are made uncomfortable. We may not agree on everything, but the conversations stretch us and, hopefully, deepen our love and understanding for each other and for the world church that connects us.

Thank you for the conversation, Clyde.



# Reflections

by Dave Hubert



Pentecostal Church, site of MWC 2009  
(photo supplied by Dave Hubert)

From July 14-19, 2009 the Assembly Gathered of Mennonite World Conference took place in Asuncion, Paraguay, under the banner “Come Together in the Way of Christ.” Ernie Wiens and Dave Hubert from the LMBC attended.

In the lead up to the Conference many people visited the Mennonite Colonies in the Chaco, where preparations for the Conference were underway. Visiting Fernheim Colony in the Chaco, and Filadelfia, its primary settlement, was an interesting experience. It was here, less than 80 years earlier, that a group of Mennonite refugees were dropped off, with very little support of any kind, to fend for themselves in what was known as the Green Hell. The way this hostile environment has been converted into a veritable garden, in addition to the social, economic, and spiritual development the region has undergone, was a wonder to behold. The three colonies in the Chaco—Colonie Menno, Colonie Fernheim, and Colonie Neuland provided much of the leadership and support for the conference in Asuncion. Over 6,000 people came from all over the globe. This was a massive undertaking for such a small organizing group, but they did it with great success.

During the visit to Fernheim two memories in particular stand out for

me. The first was when we visited the hospital. When we walked through the front door there as an immediate recognition of Ernie by the staff. It was clear that he was highly respected. The fact that he trained doctors at this hospital obviously left enormously positive memories and was deeply appreciated. The second was at a Saenger Fest at the large General Conference church in Fernheim. Choirs from various churches in Fernheim performed, including one from the Enhlet (formerly known as Lengua) and another from the Nevaclé (formerly Chulipi) both indigenous Mennonite churches. When the Nevaclé choir performed, Ernie leaned over to me and commented, “They could use some of our sopranos and we could use some of their tenors.”

One of the lasting impressions from the conference was the large number of indigenous participants in all aspects of the proceedings. Native people participated in the choir of harps that led the congregational singing, and there were indigenous choirs and drama performances. Dietrich Pana, (Richard Penner) an Enhlet radio preacher, addressed the plenary session of the conference in his native language. (Many indigenous Christians have adopted Low German names.) Simultaneous translation enabled most of the 6,000 attendees to understand his sermon. At the communion service which ended the conference, quite a number of native people participated as servers.



Indigenous harp choir leading singing (photo by Dave Hubert)

...even if we can't figure out all the details surrounding the foreign dictators, food shortages, and fair trade. We're called to lean in, to work as hard as we can toward the good, and then trust in God who says, 'The way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think.' We're called to be witnesses of how God is at play in the world.

~ Holly Sprink

This massive involvement of Paraguay's Mennonite aboriginal people reminded me of an observation of an anthropologist who said, that in all the annals of anthropology, there is not another example of an indigenous culture coming into contact with a European culture with such a positive outcome.

Other highlights included workshops:

- With Brazilian/German Mennonite Fernando Enns, who gave leadership to the World Council of Churches in getting them to adopt 2001-2011 as the decade of peace.
- With Columbian Mennonite lawyer and peace activist, Ricardo Esquivia, who spoke of persecution and imprisonment for his work for peace and justice.
- With Swiss Mennonite Hans Ulli Gerber who spoke of violence as a public health issue.
- Various European and American scholars who are being recruited by secular and Catholic universities to establish Anabaptist studies and peace programs. This included at least one former Jesuit from Spain.

Official greetings from various other Christian faith traditions, including Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, and the greeting from the Pentecostal Pastor of the Church at which the conference convened:

Meeting Johann and Monica Harder, formerly members at LMBC. We visited them on their farm and enjoyed their hospitality as they served us in the food line at the conference:

The unity, diversity, energy and goodwill:

The focus on building the Kingdom of God.

At LMBC all three of these colonies are represented. Ernie Wiens, Bill Siemens and Elsie Barga, and Karen Goertzen are from Fernheim, Isaac Goertzen is from Menno and Tillie Goertz is from Neuland.



Mass choir with many indigenous singers (photo by Dave Hubert)

The seven of us on board [the Space Shuttle] represented five different religions. But we were all agreed.... We are all children of God traveling on spaceship earth together.

~ Jake Garn



# Peace Tour

by Tena Wiebe



Photo from the *Huffington Post*, UK September 8, 2015 with the following

In North Dakota, ageing Minuteman 3 missiles, 60-foot relics of a the us-Soviet standoff, scar the landscape.... Although the weapons have been updated, and remain ready to deliver a nuclear blast anywhere around the globe within minutes, the silos in which they sit have grown old, antiquated and in a state of disrepair.... The nuclear missiles are hidden in plain view across the prairies of northwest North Dakota, Some call this 60-foot-tall Minuteman 3 missile, The Big Stick.

In 1990 the MWC Assembly was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba and Rudy and I attended that event. It had a record 13,000 people registered, the largest attendance to date. They came from 70 countries on 5 continents. At the 1984 MWC gathering in Strasbourg, Ron Sider, a theologian and social activist, gave a powerful call for a more active and sacrificial Mennonite peace witness. This challenge led to the founding of Christian Peacemaking Teams, which has since expanded to include many other peacemaking groups.

The theme for the 1990 Winnipeg Assembly was “Witnessing to Christ in Today’s World”. Terms such as justice, solidarity, liberation, reconciliation and holistic gospel were integrated in this theme. The Oka crisis and native issues were major concerns at that time and so an early morning session drew hundreds of people to hear Elijah Harper, a Cree chief and provincial and federal politician, talk about aboriginal issues.

In connection with the Assemblies, a series of tours are always organized so people can visit historic and cul-

tural sites in the area. In 1990 twelve different tours were offered. A friend from Goshen, Indiana and I chose the Peace Witness Tour, organized by Christian Peacemaking Teams as a result of Ron Sider’s challenge in 1984.

Six busloads of participants took the 135 kilometre trip to North Dakota to gather for worship and a legal witness at the nuclear launch site called B-11 or Frost Fire. On the trip down, we were given information about these sites.

There are 300 Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles in the northern part of North Dakota, clustered close to the Canadian border just south of Winkler and Morden, Manitoba. They are located here because it is the most direct route from mainland USA to Russia. Each missile carries 3 nuclear bombs. Each bomb has 25 times the explosive force of the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima.

The driveway to the underground missile site had been blocked, forcing the buses to pull off the highway and park in the field. A US Marshall told us we were not permitted to walk on the gravel driveway because that was US government property. Three hundred of us walked 100 metres through a farmer’s field, silently following people carrying a wooden cross made of fence posts from a Southern Manitoba Mennonite farm. The launch site was surrounded by a high wire fence topped with barbed wire. We were to keep 7 metres away from this fence, so they had placed pylons as reminders. Our service was watched over by four members of the US Air Force, who sat in a truck. A fifth patrolled inside the barbed-wire fence.

Pat Shelly from Kansas led the one hour worship service. Two other speakers, involved in peace organizations, were Mukanza Ilunga from Zaire and Brian Paetkau who lived in Carmen, Manitoba, close to these missile sites. The service included the reading of scripture, prayers in several languages and singing hymns.

Just a few metres from where we stood, was this missile with 3 nuclear warheads attached, lodged in a 3-storey deep underground silo, aimed at the Soviet Union and capable of destroying 1-2 million people. We stood there worshipping and praying for peace.

At the end of the worship service the people spontaneously formed a circle around the fence, holding hands and somebody started to sing “We Shall Overcome”.

Besides people from Canada and the US, the group included representatives from Germany, France, Honduras, Zaire, Spain, Switzerland, Japan and over 30 from Holland. Also present was Ron Sider.

On the return trip we were asked for written comments about our experience, which were printed in a small booklet. I wrote, “The contrast will remain in my mind and memory: grasshoppers, hay bales, blue sky and barley fields, and enclosed in a mesh and barb wire fence, the possibility of 3 Hiroshimas.”

(I realized later that the destructive force was immeasurably greater than 3 Hiroshimas.)



# The Lendrum Choir Presents an Immigrant's Story

by Carol Dyck



LMBC Choir 1987; Ron Dyck conducting some of the singers who sang in Strasbourg in 1984 (photo from Mennonite Centre Archives)

Mennonite World Conference 1984—Strasbourg, France

I grew up in a Mennonite church in Saskatoon, but the culture there did not include stories of past experiences of Mennonites, nor an emphasis on traditional Mennonite values such as non-violence. There was a strong emphasis on music, which I certainly profited from, but basically it was a culture of evangelicalism without our particular roots.

It was not until we came to be part of the Lendrum church that I began to learn about those roots. I had never felt much pride in being Evangelical and the name “Mennonite” was just embarrassing. But here I found ideas I could truly be proud of. I loved that we joined peace marches, and actively worked towards social justice. I loved that we built community around story-telling.

I began having tea with Mrs. Justina Siemens, an elderly woman in the church who told me the story of her escape from Russia. Her story was exciting and it gave me a deep respect for her courage and endurance. So I decided to set her story to music. I wrote a cantata called *Every Deliverance*, which was a collection of solos and choral pieces. We performed it here, and in several places around Alberta. Most rewarding was the fact that this elderly woman became a hero in her community.

Then Rudy Wiebe had the idea that we should take it to the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France. So he wrote letters. Simultaneously, Frieda Claassen dreamt of us singing at the conference. So it was meant to be. Sixty-seven singers paid their own way to Strasbourg and we performed *Every Deliverance* under the direction of Ron Dyck.

It was very moving for me to consider the dilemmas of the people in the cantata as their convictions were seriously put to the test. They were people who were strongly committed to nonviolence, but they were forced to watch as their communities were ravaged by the terrible violence of the Russian Revolution. Some attempted to take up arms

in self-defense, but that ended badly. Others tried to stay ahead of the revolution by moving east.

Mrs. Siemens’s family had done the latter, and they lived in a village near the Amur River. China was on the other side of the river. The entire village packed up their sleighs and crossed the frozen Amur River on a bitterly cold winter night. They crossed over into China and eventually ended up in Harbin. We ended the cantata by singing the hymn “Now Thank We All Our God”, a hymn that many Mennonites escaping from Russia sang at the first stop after the Russian border.

Attending the conference was a great experience, mingling with people from so many countries. After our performance someone brought a woman from Brazil to meet me. She had been a member of that village and so this was her story. But clearly many of the people at the conference were not descended from the original Mennonites. They had chosen to stand in this long line of history and to share the concerns of the Mennonite tradition.

# A Front Row Seat

by Rudy Wiebe



Photo from the 1962 MB Herald

The seventh Mennonite World Conference, which met in Kitchener, Ontario on August 1-7, 1962, was the first ever held in Canada. At that time I had been founding editor of the weekly *MB Herald* for all of six months, and I had already covered the MB annual conference in Abbotsford, BC, but this meeting would bring together Anabaptists from everywhere on earth. What an event! So I flew from Winnipeg to Toronto - the first plane flight of my life.

The front cover of the August 10, 1962 *Herald* carried the picture of the MWC president, Harold Bender, Goshen, USA, addressing 10,000 people in the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium on Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup>. (We had fast mail service in those days!) Ranged behind him was the white-robed 750-voice Ontario All-Mennonite Choir.

The lead article reported: “Dr. Bender stated that the original hopes of the founding father of the world conferences, Christian Neff (German pastor & historian, 1925), were his also:

- renewal of the spiritual life of our churches;
- revival and appreciation for the historic faith;
- drawing together of Mennonites from the various countries of the world.

We need mutual stimulation, he said, to gain new vision of the need around us ... to be willing to work together as *Glaubenskonferenz* (believers’ gathering), to seek in humble faith to listen to each other.”

In ways amazing to me as an official reporter, I was listening, writing, talking, taking pictures, every long day I observed the Kitchener gathering develop those hopes. The conference theme was “The Lordship of Christ.” Over 12,000 persons registered, from 15 North American Mennonite denominations; more than 500 persons came from

outside North America. The conference program estimated there were 390,500 Mennonites on five continents; 220,300 of them lived in North America, including 13 still in Cuba after the Cold War nuclear crisis of October, 1961.

Every day began with singing and Bible study, followed by a theological study and discussion. The afternoon offered another study and also many sectional meetings, including Women (topics like “Women Serve under the Lordship of Christ,” etc.); Men (“The Role of the Laity,” etc.); Young People (“Mennonite University Students and the Church,” etc.); Peace (“Peace Witness and the Gospel,” etc); Literature (“What are We Doing?” - reports from 9 countries, including Japan and Indonesia). In the evening, choral concerts were followed by reports on Mennonites and church life around the world.

The very first evening delivered a Cold War shock. Peter Dyck, director of MCC Europe, reported that one tenth of Mennonite world membership, 40,000 people, lived in the Soviet Union, but not a single delegate had been allowed to come to Canada. No Mennonite church as such existed in the USSR. Believers met in homes or worshiped with others as they could, but under Khrushchev Christians were still considered “parasites” and the official policy remained: eradicate all religion. The packed auditorium fell silent in a long prayer for our fellow believers behind the Iron Curtain.

The conference was an editor’s dream: for three weeks I could load the *Herald* with news, articles and pictures from all over the world, of

individual profiles, of new ideas for Christian witness, of discussions and debate on subjects like peace witness, women's dress, "Who is a Mennonite?," nuclear warfare, missions in a fast-changing world, race relations, and many more. The August 24 issue carried a "Symposium" of comments on the conference by six commentators. One of them was Andreas Balzer of Fernheim, Paraguay, who raised the question many people felt: "What is the aim of a 'Mennonite World conference?'" He answered:

"For myself, the answer is this: the World Conference provides a ground on which mutual sharing and mutual exchange of concerns becomes an experience which is universal in scope... Also, it provides a splendid opportunity to experience a sense of unity in action... In a world of tension, disunity and disagreement, unity in action gives us the assurance that unity among believers exists and is going to exist as long as Christ is the Lord."

Fifty-three years ago: the images and words in my *Herald* copies still lift me into thankful memories of meeting particular people:

*Vincent Harding*: a black Mennonite who a week before had been in an Albany, Georgia, prison for three days, arrested because he and six others were praying for peace on the steps of Albany City Hall. His conference talk, "The Christian and Race Relations," was on the cover of the September 7 *Herald*.

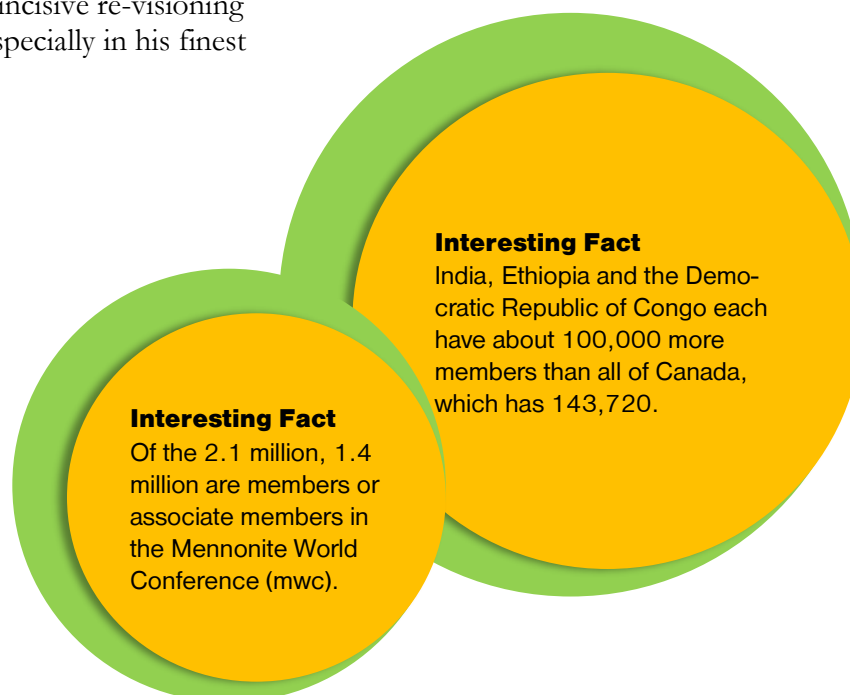
*John Howard Yoder*: the theologian who would soon become known everywhere for his incisive re-visioning of the Anabaptist peace position, especially in his finest book, *The Politics of Jesus*, (1972).

*Marilyn Monroe*: I didn't actually meet the world's most glamorous woman in Kitchener, but, unforgettably, I heard of her. together with 10,000 others on Sunday morning, August 5. Alone in her Los Angeles house, an empty pill bottle on the floor. The preacher who began his sermon by telling us these facts, quietly and sadly, reminded us that even for "the beautiful and powerful of this world," life is filled with suffering.

*Victor Vogt*: a Vancouver student who confessed that "in the not too distant past [he] had been somewhat of a cynic about Mennonite affairs," but then, from his 1962 MWC experience, offered six finely reasoned challenges "to those who may still be cynically inclined." Eight months later, after I had to resign as editor of the *MB Herald*, Victor was instrumental in me finding a new world of Christian work and friends at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

In 1962 world Mennonite membership was reported to be 390,497. In 2015 the Harrisburg, PA. Conference noted that baptized world membership of Anabaptist Mennonite churches totaled 2,115,195. By continent, the largest number are in Africa: 736,801 (1962: 27,809). Only 3,000 live in Russia.

Who could have imagined such incredible growth in half a century! And where, o where has gone Low German and borscht? It is a comfort to know that Jesus never spoke the one nor ate the other.





Happiness is not perfected until it is shared.

We become human only in the company of other human beings. And this involves both opening our hearts and giving voice to our deepest convictions. ...When we shrink from the world, our souls shrink, too.  
~ Paul Rogat Loeb

Each of us must rededicate ourselves to serving the common good.... Our individual fates are linked; our futures intertwined; and if we act in that knowledge and in that spirit together, as the Bible says: "We can move mountains."  
~ Jimmy Carter

What matters isn't the color of the crayon but the picture they're coloring.

We live in a world where everything is connected. We can no longer think in terms of us and them when it comes to the consequences of the way we live. Today it's all about WE.  
~ Gregg Braden

If tolerance, respect and equity permeate family life, they will translate into values that shape societies, nations and the world.  
~ Kofi Annan (former UN secretary)

All people smile in the same language.

#### **Interesting Fact**

Most of the Anabaptist churches' growth is happening among people who are financially poor, while 95% of the financial resources are located in North America and Europe.