

Cali, 03 December 2015

Dear sisters and brothers,

We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace.

We share with you the attached *Psalm of Hope* of the Mennonite Brethren congregation located in La Esperanza (Cauca), Colombia, South America. (The church is located in the town of La Esperanza, which in Spanish means hope.)

The psalm expresses what has been the experience of this church over the past months. We think it very important that the larger community of faith in Colombia and throughout the world be informed and surround these sisters and brothers in prayer. To this end, we ask that you share this letter and the attached psalm with your churches and that it be a matter of prayer to God for protection and strength for this church and the entire community, and for the witness that the church can be to its neighbours.

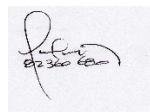
The events that have transpired in La Esperanza are part of a decades-long armed conflict in Colombia. For this reason, we also ask that you pray that the negotiations currently taking place in Havana between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla will conclude promptly and successfully and that the agreements will be ratified by Colombian society. We believe this will be an important step toward fostering conditions for peace in La Esperanza and throughout the country.

At the same time as we express our gratitude for your solidarity with the Mennonite Brethren Church in La Esperanza, we know that in many places throughout the world there is war, violence and hunger. So this is a call for prayer not only in behalf of La Esperanza and Colombia, but that God's salvation and peace become a reality throughout the world.

We know that true and perfect peace will come with the lordship of Jesus Christ. We ask that you join us in prayer so that we may all be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, announcing the gospel and inviting all to follow him.

Finally, if you wish to write a letter of support and encouragement to the sisters and brothers of the La Esperanza Mennonite Brethren Church, you may address your email to buenfrancisco3@yahoo.es or Funpazcon@yahoo.es.

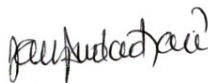
With gratitude,



Francisco Mosquera
President, Mennonite Brethren
Valle and Cauca Region, Colombia



Ricardo Pinzón
Director, Fundación Mencoldes
Bogotá, Colombia



Jenny Neme
Director, Asociación Justapaz
Bogotá, Colombia



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A psalm for hope

“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, NRSV).

Our hope is in God, whom we honour at all times.

We arise in the morning thinking of you, Lord, and giving thanks for the blessings of each day.

We arise remembering the night of 13 April 2015 when a guerrilla commando of the FARC entered *La Esperanza* (“hope” in Spanish), a town in rural Colombia, and attacked some 50 soldiers of the Colombian army who had set up camp in a sports arena belonging to the civilian population of the town.

We shudder at the thought that scarcely two metres away some of the sisters and brothers of the local Mennonite Brethren church had their homes. Tragically, 11 soldiers were killed and 23 wounded; the incident almost broke the peace negotiations between the government and the FARC taking place in Havana, Cuba.

We begin to feel some of the fear that the sisters and brothers of the church and other community members must have felt that death seemed imminent in the crossfire.

We think of our sisters and brothers of La Esperanza and we pray to you, oh God, for their lives, for their protection and for their strength.

Our hope is in God, whom we praise at all times.

In the afternoon, we kneel before you, Lord Jesus, to pray for the members of the Mennonite Brethren church who are active in their community and hold positions of leadership in the community.

After the events of 13 April 2015, their lives have become filled with unease. They have been stigmatized and they are being watched, even when they meet for worship. Now they, too, are under threat. Lord, protect them.

Land mines have been planted around the town and a 7-year old girl was killed by a mine. God, give them peace amid the tension and polarization created by the armed parties.

People of the church and the community have been pressured to collaborate in one way or another. Loving God, fill them with wisdom and prudence to know how best to respond.

The distrust that has been sown, together with the emotional impact of what they have experienced, has left in them a residue of fear and isolation.

We think of you, our sisters and brothers of La Esperanza and we pray to God for your lives, for your protection, for your strength.

Our hope is in God, whom we glorify at all times.

At nightfall, we reflect on our sisters and brothers of the church in La Esperanza – how, in spite of it all, they have remained strong and continue to help their community of La Esperanza to move forward.

They witness to how knowing Christ and God's Word has given them strength. Prayer has reaffirmed their hope and their commitment.

We thank you, loving God, because they continue with their social action and uphold the vision of encouraging and collaborating with the wider community in overcoming the problems that affect their lives. At the same time, they emphasize the encouragement they receive from knowing that there are brothers and sisters elsewhere in Colombia and throughout the world who remember them and pray for them.

We think of our sisters and brothers of the church in La Esperanza and we pray to you, Lord, for their lives, their protection, their strength.

Our hope is in God, whom we exalt at all times.

Before we sleep, we ask, Lord, that your Spirit enable progress in the negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla. If an accord is reached, it would make it possible to take steps toward peaceful relations in Colombia that would lead to positive changes for this church and the wider community. We ask, Lord, that the community of faith throughout Colombia and the world uphold in prayer our sisters and brothers and the whole community of La Esperanza.

Our hope is in God, whom we honour at all times

Amen.

—Submitted by the Mennonite Brethren church of the Cauca & Valle Region of Colombia, and by Mencoldes, Justapaz and CEAS: organizations of the Anabaptist churches of Colombia working to foster development, justice, peace and psychosocial and spiritual support for victims of the armed conflict and for reconciliation.