

Courier Correo Courier

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**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

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Word from the editor

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Renewal 2019, Costa Rica

Photo: Ebenezer Mondez

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Connected by the Spirit

Assembly is a life changing experience. This event every six years was the “conference” in Mennonite World Conference for several decades. It remains a highlight for members around the world – both those who are working daily to foster connections within the Anabaptist-Mennonite family, and those who mainly attend the big events.

It is a time when Anabaptist-Mennonites from around the world encounter each other in our differing worship styles – especially the more Pentecostal influenced styles that often characterize the Global South.

“Once you’ve been to one, you can’t stop because a global fellowship like this is rare,” says Elina Ciptadi, who first went to Assembly in Zimbabwe in 2003.

“My favorite memory is the exuberance and joy of making music together with songs from all around the world,” says Mark Wenger, a pastor from Pennsylvania who sang in the 2015 international choir.

These memories drive excitement for the extra-long-awaited Assembly 17 in Indonesia. It was postponed one year due to the pandemic.

The long tail of the pandemic touches Assembly as well; attendance is restricted to 700 participants – far below the expected thousands. But we hope to gather nevertheless, as we have learned these past two years, connecting as tiny faces on screens and tenuous internet links.

“[Assembly is] where we find co-conspirators on the journey of building the kingdom of God. Here we meet other Jesus followers who are passionate about justice, peace and community. Other kindred spirits,” says Rianna Isaak-Krauß, who met her husband at the Pennsylvania Assembly in 2015. “That connection is really powerful.”

The Holy Spirit is part of what makes that connection between diverse peoples happen and in such a powerful way in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit has played a stronger role in moments of the Anabaptist movement and has been relegated to the background of our thinking and speaking as churches in others. In the last decades, Pentecostal movements have brought individual and corporate spirituality that emphasize openness to the Holy Spirit. These movements have both invigorated and threatened our churches.

This issue looks at some of the challenges and opportunities Anabaptist-Mennonites encounter as we relate with Christians from Pentecostal movements and those within our own family who might be called “Mennoscostals.”

We will have further opportunity to learn about being connected by the Holy Spirit (and the internet) in our diversity of worship style and theological leanings as we gather by the thousands for Assembly in July. May the Spirit reach through our screens and guide us on our journeys as co-conspirators, encouraging each other to seek peace and justice as we build the kingdom of God.

Karla Braun is editor of *Courier* and writer for Mennonite World Conference. She lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

Tell us what you have experienced living out your faith among Christians who are attuned to the Holy Spirit.

✉ info@mwc-cmm.org

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Anabaptists and Pentecostals
The Global Anabaptist Project* says: “Pentecostalism is the most rapidly growing expression of Christianity in the world, and Anabaptists are not foreigners to this reality.”

Anabaptists around the world experience this by practicing an expression of faith that César García, general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, calls “Mennocostal.”

Many Anabaptist-Mennonites today combine Christ-centred theology and

emphasis on peacemaking with a spontaneous Spirit-led approach that is often associated with Pentecostalism and charismatic movements.

However, the vibrancy of these rapidly growing churches can also cause discomfort when their expansion seems to come at the expense of one’s own family.

What does the growth of Pentecostalism mean for Anabaptists?

“Pentecostalism is in our century the closest parallel to what Anabaptism was in the 16th century,” wrote C. Arnold Snyder in *Anabaptist History and Theology*.

Anabaptism has been shaped and reshaped by waves of renewal. There were the passionate and risk-taking re-baptizers of the sixteenth century; Pietist revivals among Mennonites in what is now Ukraine; the influence of the East Africa Revival of the 1930s on Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania and Kenya Mennonite Church; the birth of JKI (Jemaat Kristen Indonesia) within a youth prayer movement; the flourishing of Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia in the 1980s despite political persecution.

“Pentecostal movements, charismatic renewals make a similar experience as we did as Anabaptist-Mennonites. Fresh reading of the Bible together, being inspired, the freedom, the joy,” says Bernhard Ott, retired dean of Bienenberg, a Mennonite Bible institute in Switzerland.



Costa Rica, 2019

Photo: Henk Stenvers

Wonder and witness, works and Word

* Global Anabaptist Profile (GAP), an extensive three-year survey of 24 member conferences of Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Learn more: <https://mwc-cmm.org/courier/stories/unique-opportunity-greater-unity>

To the extent that the church is a place of societal transformation and a promoter of peace and justice, it is a sign of the reign of God.

But “openness to what God is doing is also linked to uncertainty and lack of control,” he says. A process of institutionalization challenges spontaneity for better or worse. The waves of Anabaptist renewal developed theology, training, critical reflection, and lost some openness in the process.

“The Anabaptist movement... started losing the enthusiasm that accompanied it at the beginning,” says Pedro Calix, a Mennonite pastor from Honduras.

What opportunities does the burgeoning Pentecostal movement hold for Anabaptists?

“It is a great opportunity to rethink the idea of returning to our charismatic roots and open ourselves to what the Holy Spirit wants to do within our faith communities while not losing our Anabaptist identity,” says Pedro Calix.

Neal Blough observes how worship in a Pentecostal style connects with those from the Majority World more than the rational forms of Swiss or Russian streams of Anabaptism. Professor emeritus of church history at Faculte Libre de theologie Evangelique in France, he worships with an urban congregation located in Europe but influenced by members from the rest of the world. “How much is it theological and how much is it cultural?” he asks. “Pentecostal and charismatic worship is more bodily, corporal, expressive, lively, joyful, and that corresponds to what I know of people from the Global South.”

For the Mennonite Brethren church in Brazil, the departure of congregations from the plateaued Anabaptist conference to rapidly growing Pentecostal movements caused leaders to realize an opportunity.

“We can see in Scriptures that the early church was led by the Holy Spirit. We value the Word of God. Yet, we didn’t know what it means to be led by Holy Spirit,” says Rodrigo Justino, a Mennonite Brethren pastor from Brazil, now studying theology in Canada. As both movements encountered each other in learning, the Mennonite Brethren in Brazil now “are not Pentecostal. But we’re not only Anabaptist. We’re a mix of both.”

“Pentecostals bring in pathos; it’s not only emotion in a cheap way, but it’s the affections. Pentecostals bring back a spiritual dimension [to *orthopraxy*]: it’s the power of God, the power of the Spirit that transforms us; we don’t just do it ourselves,” says Bernhard Ott. “We can learn much from that.”

Anabaptist-Mennonites are known for theological focus on *living (orthopraxy)*.

Ethics can become a burden without the power of the Holy Spirit; we require “spiritual power for the Anabaptist vision,” says Bernhard Ott. Pentecostal perspectives can help remind Anabaptist-Mennonites of our theology of the reign of God which is “already-and-not-yet. God’s power is breaking now, not just in the future.”

To the extent that the church is a place of societal transformation and a promoter of peace and justice, it is a sign of the reign of God.

What are the challenges?

Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Latin America have many influences from Pentecostalism.

Among the negative effects are “that the liturgy often uses Biblical texts out of context, which can be seen in some of the songs that place a lot of emphasis on spiritual warfare or the prosperity gospel,” says Pedro Calix.

Rodrigo Justino notes that in Brazil, Pentecostals “don’t focus on criteria for authority – they focus on gifts. They can’t deny the woman has pastoral gifts: a prophetess, an evangelist.” However, the “top” leadership of the churches still skews male.

Pentecostal churches often rely on the spirituality of the founder; a dynasty is built. “There can be a problem of holding on to power,” says Rodrigo Justino.

In Indonesia, JKI founder’s passion for prayerful, Spirit-directed service has permeated the movement; his Mennonite roots are less evident, says Rony Kristanto, a pastor in the “Mennocostal” JKI synod.

Rapid growth can drive this problem of theological grounding. Pentecostal movements can grow “as vast as the

ocean but as shallow as a puddle,” says Rodrigo Justino. “They can become prey to other movements. We [Anabaptists] can help in terms of theology. They can help us discern voice of the Spirit, what it means to live by faith. To start something, you don’t need to have money, structure; you only need faith, courage to preach. Everything else the Lord will do among us. This is a huge lesson.”

Pentecostalism is still characterized in some ways by the first-generation experience of newness and signs and wonders.

“Every Protestant movement has had this cyclical process,” says Neal Blough. Those in new movements need to think theologically, realize they are not the first Christians, observe how others have navigated the shift to become more structured and learn from them.

What gifts might Anabaptists – now a mature movement – and the still-young and developing Pentecostal movement hold for each other?

“The gifts of service, solidarity, discipleship, and teaching,” says Pedro Calix.

“We all want to bring God’s reign to come to this world,” says Rony Kristanto.

“Pentecostals try to materialize and manifest salvation through healing

and salvation and physical blessing... [something that] happens here and now.

This testimony of salvation, this good news, is not in heaven, in the future, it is now. “A problem in Indonesia is people don’t have social security, so physical healing is very important for them.”

The early members of JKI followed this example. “It started with prayer. Every time before they went to a [ministry] area they were praying for this area,”

Rony Kristanto says.

“Social engagement cannot be separated from charismatic experience of Holy Spirit,” he says. Mennonites also work with the poor and oppressed, but Pentecostals minister “not only as social work but due to vision, prayer,...spiritual warfare.”

“We need to sing each other’s songs,” says Neal Blough, referencing the work of Janie Blough who studies and teaches worship. “We need to sing each other, not draw into only one stream.”

The vibrance of Pentecostal worship has lessons of vitality for Mennonites, but the Anabaptist tradition offers the insight that forming disciples is a deeper process than emotional music and a sermon.

“Anabaptist-Mennonites have something to offer regarding humility and community,” says Neal Blough. Discipleship and ethics are also helpful correctives to a movement

that tends to be too individualistic.

He observes increasing ecumenical engagement from Pentecostals where they are seeking other church’s experience in becoming more structured as a maturing movement.

Anabaptist Mennonites can be corrective to Pentecostals to not only look at wonder and power, but to look at ethics – how you live; the peace witness, says Bernhard Ott. “*Word and works* has always been with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice. The Pentecostal movement brings in experiencing the power of God. This is a good challenge.... Mennonites can speak to Pentecostals if it becomes too one sided.”

Retired theology professor Claude Baecher observes an interest in Anabaptist history and theology in his region in France.

“Being close, present, even fraternal to these churches seems to me as important as our involvement in ecumenical circles. This has to be done with a strong Christ-centered biblical approach.

“We should avoid too rapid (spiritual) judgment and be present with teaching tools: Anabaptist history, exegesis, ethics, practical theology, peace-centred theology, dialogue,” he says.

And with humility.

In Brazil, struggling with a potential church schism between the older, conservative Mennonite Brethren churches and new churches following a Spirit-led path, church leaders found a way through by learning humility together. “We struggled with our pride, our resentment [about members leaving]. We were grasping opportunities and protecting ourselves from threats,” says Rodrigo Justino.

“It’s about what God is doing in terms of grace,” says Rodrigo Justino. Follow Jesus in humility. “When you decide to do this, you have beauty. It’s different than you and me, us and them, it starts to be us. We work together.”



Unlimited Fire youth conference, 2018.

Photo: Ebenzer Mondez

Zimbabwe Pentecostalism, Anabaptism and the Africa Christian climate

by Mfakazi Ndlovu

Pentecostalism has become the most rapidly growing expression of Christianity in the world today. Anabaptists in the African context are not foreigners to this reality. The desire to break free from missionary control, or better put 'a quest for spiritual liberty', has seen an impetus in the Pentecostal expression within Anabaptist domains.

In Southern African over the last 20 years, the spiritual climate is more inclined toward Pentecostalism and away from Anabaptist and other traditional/mainline churches. Much of the character, thought and practice of the African church is being patterned against or mimics that of Pentecostal movements. Traditional churches are struggling to compete for numbers with Pentecostal churches whose spiritual fervency connects with African traditional religion.

How does this affect the Anabaptist churches in Africa?

Anabaptists need to embrace the growth of Pentecostalism within the African context. It is not something that Anabaptist churches can do away with because it is here to stay.

Over time, the highest expression of spirituality in African churches has been idealized as Pentecostal spirituality. The key being its fervency. Many African Christians see the traditional churches, with style of faith, worship and practice taught by the missionaries as lacking spiritual fervency. Now, African believers seek a passionate expression of faith and spirituality, and Pentecostalism is offering that.

Offering that fervency, the Anabaptist church is seeing believers either leaving their congregation or infiltrating it within practices from Pentecostalism. The dramatic sermons, the fervent prayers, the singing, the dancing, the casting out of demons, the calling out to the

To develop a more effective and fervent Christian context, dialogue must exist between camps.

Holy Spirit, the infilling moments, and all other Pentecostal expressions are more appealing to many African believers today, than are the sombre and subtle expressions of worship commonly seen within the Anabaptist churches. These characteristics connect well with the average African, making Pentecostalism seem more African than foreign.

The opportunity that Pentecostalism seems to offer is a truly African expression of faith in the Triune God. Unlike African Traditional Churches, Pentecostalism has firm belief in most fundamental truths that conservative Christians adhere to, but is at times guilty in application. The opportunity for the Anabaptist church is to relate these Scriptural and theological truths into more meaningful expressions that are relevant to African believers.

But, the downside of this Pentecostal movement is the creation of splinter church movements. The African climate is saturated with Pentecostal movements that have translated into so many charismatic movements from which even other Pentecostal churches are divorcing themselves. These splinter-churches have become a threat to the stability of Christianity within the Southern African region. Opponents to the Christian faith with our region are blaming Pentecostalism of creating counterfeit pastors, prophets, Man-of-God and the prosperity gospel.

It is critical for dialogue to exist between Pentecostalism and Anabaptism. The key is to identify points of confluence and points of divergence. To develop a more effective

and fervent Christian context, dialogue must exist between camps. Pentecostalism must be strengthened with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, thought and practice, rather than just feeling, expression and experience.

Ecumenical relations are now initiating dialogue, seminars, trainings and workshops on best ways to communicate an African Christian expression that is not contrary to biblical teaching. Churches are now coming together to critique certain splinter movements that seek to convey a Biblical message of Christian expression that is not in line with Christian doctrine, thought and practice. Leaders and teachers are collaborating from both Pentecostal and missionary churches to produce and publish articles and literature that will educate the Christian masses on the proper Christian values and practice. Television and radio dialogues are broadcast with pastors, leaders and teachers from various church backgrounds to debate true Christian teachings.

Anabaptists now need to realize the need for dialogue with Pentecostal movements. In our African context, the desire is to experience a truly African Christian Spirituality. Yet, Anabaptist teaching on properly and effectively handling biblical texts is also crucial. If we are not communicating the most effective African Spirituality that embraces the best from both Anabaptism and Pentecostalism, then African believers will be swayed by misconstrued spiritual expressions.



Mfakazi Ndlovu has a Bachelor of Arts in Theology, a Postgraduate Diploma in corporate governance, and a Master of Business Administration. He served as lecturer and academic dean at Ekupheleni Bible Institute, a Brethren In Christ Church (BICC) Bible college in Zimbabwe, as adjunct lecturer with the Theological College of Zimbabwe, and has served BICC Zimbabwe as an administrative clerk.

India

Together proclaim the “manifold wisdom of God”

by Shantkumar Kunjam

The missionaries from USA started Mennonite mission work in central India, presently Chhattisgarh state in November 1899. They began with philanthropic works, providing relief to the drought-stricken people. The first baptism of 43 new converts was in December 1900. At the beginning, membership grew very rapidly. In 1949, when the Mission Work Golden Jubilee was celebrated, baptized membership was 1 579.

During the years following, MCI was not growing numerically as was hoped. Early MCI Indian leaders made some attempts to start new churches in new areas. Overall, however, having been satisfied with maintaining the status quo, MCI did no self-evaluation.

Possibly God was not satisfied with this maintenance of the status quo, and thus emerged the Pentecostal movement.

The coming of Pentecostals in MCI conference area

Before the 1970s, I remember some Pentecostal preachers were invited to preach at special occasions by local churches and also by the MCI Conference. They were mostly such preachers who could stir people emotionally.

In early 70s, Pentecostal presence was felt more in some urban Mennonite churches where membership was mixed from other denominations. In the main Mennonite church, Pentecostal worship services started in a private house in the mid-70s. Especially, the Mennonite youth who were not in the forefront of MCI activities started meeting for worship and fellowship in private houses. Non-Christians also started attending those Pentecostal house meetings.

The meetings were marked for their lively and emotionally charged singing and praying. Slowly the movement picked up momentum. New birth, immersion baptism, tithing and speaking in tongues were emphasized. People were encouraged to shout “Alleluia”, “Amen” and “Praise the Lord” during preaching. In worship services people were encouraged to share what the Lord had done in their lives during the

previous week. At times, simple foods were freely served after worship services.

During weekdays, Pentecostal pastors regularly made house visitations, even in Mennonite houses. Praying for sick was boldly done. The pastors sought every opportunity to make their presence noted, like at funerals. They would often befriend well-off MCI members who were not very active in MCI churches. Slowly, Pentecostal house churches increased in numbers. They rapidly spread to more and more cities and villages and grew in numbers. The enthusiastic lay leaders were encouraged to attend Pentecostal Bible schools, and after completions they would be given congregations to serve.

It seems, there was not much institutionalized system. The pastors were the decision makers in all matters and free in running the local congregations.

We should be able to rejoice in what God has been doing, bringing more and more people to Jesus Christ’s fold through the ministries of the Pentecostals.

MCI churches and Pentecostal presence

At first, though the church leaders invited distant Pentecostal preachers for preaching, the local Pentecostals were discouraged. Mennonite members who had joined Pentecostal movement were forced to leave Mennonite churches. But the persistent presence and increasing number of Pentecostals have changed the MCI thinking tacitly. Also many of MCI members married Pentecostal-background wives who have become active in the MCI churches.

Now the presence of Pentecostal churches and leaders are acknowledged and accepted. There is no more open rivalry between the two. In fact, the MCI has accepted changes in its own worship patterns. There is more singing in worship and people are invited to share what the

Lord has been doing in their lives during the past week.

The Pentecostal pastors are accepted with due respect. Mennonite pastors are encouraged to pray for the non-Christians attending worship services afterwards. Prayer requests asked by the non-Christian are included in the pastoral prayers, and they are also allowed to share their testimonies in Sunday worship services.

This has encouraged unaffiliated village Pentecostal groups to seek MCI leadership. MCI on its part establishes those groups first as prayer centres and supporting the leaders there, and then, with certain conditions met, recognizes them as full-fledged MCI unit churches.

Some other attempts are also being made in MCI to rejuvenate members for evangelistic ministry.

Suggestions for relations with Pentecostals

1. Since this Pentecostal movement is a global phenomenon, we should accept it as God’s doing. We will do right to accept Jewish law teacher Professor Gamaliel’s advice mentioned in Acts 5:33-39.
2. We need to do self-evaluation, why God has raised the Pentecostalism in spite of the presence of the established churches. It is like the early 16th-century rise of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement.
3. We should be able to rejoice in what God has been doing, bringing more and more people to Jesus Christ’s fold through the ministries of the Pentecostals.
4. The established churches should find ways to develop working relationships with the Pentecostals and other churches.
5. We should accept inadequacy of any one church denomination, including of MCI denomination, in not being alone able to proclaim the “manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:9-11). We need unity of spirit with and co-operations of churches for this calling.



Shantkumar Kunjam is bishop of Mennonite Church in India Conference, and lives in Rajnandgaon, Chhatisgarh, India.

Germany

Worshipping a living and active Spirit

by Kellie Swope

My church journey in and out of Mennonite and Pentecostal traditions begins before I was born. Because of a thoughtless and frankly embarrassing comment from the pulpit toward her at age 15, my mother left the Mennonite church at the age of 18.

She and my father raised their children in evangelical churches until emotional healing finally came from a church plant in New Holland, Pennsylvania, USA. Interestingly enough, though classed as non-denominational, this congregation was planted by Mennonites and was marked by the gifts of the Holy Spirit which sprang from the Pentecostal movement.

After leaving for Bible school, my own church journey took me through a spectrum of movements that some might find uncomfortable at the very least and others name as cult-like at worst. I finally found stability when I based my faith not on a movement or denomination but rather my relationship with God and in the study of God's Word.

It is precisely the appreciation of Anabaptist principles of following Jesus held in balance with the spontaneity of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit that equips me to help lead an international church.

Anabaptist research opens questions

Also interestingly, it's precisely because of research I did on Anabaptist history, a movement which emphasized the principles of truth from the Word, pacifism and social justice, that I began to question some things. Why did both Pentecostal and Mennonite movements back-burner things that were hallmarks of the other's movement when good things clearly sprang out of them?

For example, why did it seem charismatic churches sent their children to Mennonite and Calvinist camps to memorize Scripture and learn more Bible stories?

On the other hand, why does it seem Mennonite preachers often relegate teaching on the Holy Spirit to a brushed off sermon once or twice a year?

Although there are secondary doctrinal issues that define us differently as Pentecostals and Mennonites, eventually I realized it doesn't have to be an "either/or" mentality but a "both/and."

Pentecostal zeal enlivens faith

This realization came when I researched the history of the Anabaptist movement and I saw the zeal that fired up so many in the early days of the movement to give up their lives for the truth that they believed. It changed my thinking because I realized that their fire was as much- if not more- zeal for the Lord then I experienced in any Pentecostal or charismatic church.

In my own history, more than one ancestor lost entire families for not backing down on their Protestant beliefs in France, or fled Germany with other persecuted Anabaptists.

Just as my own mother's journey came full-circle to receive emotional and spiritual healing through a Mennonite church plant, so my family's healing continues through the places God is leading me. Now I serve on the leadership team of a multi-cultural international church in Halle, Germany, planted through cooperation between Verband Deutsche Mennoniten, Eastern Mennonite Mission and Deutsches Mennonitisches Missionskomitee.

Balance guides multi-cultural welcome

The balance I've learned of acknowledging the Holy Spirit as much as loving the Father in Jesus Christ as a living and active part of the God I worship has served me well.

At Soli Deo Church, we offer services in multiple languages at almost every gathering including Sunday services, so we've learned we need a similar balance. We have to be patient and be open with people from all sorts of different backgrounds as much as they have to be patient with us.

There is a balance between holding onto our beliefs that may be based on Western church culture and recognizing that other cultures have an expression of Jesus inside of them that is based on their backgrounds as they come to the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit. We may look different, but we are one as we look toward Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Learning to listen to each other in love is so important. Some who have joined us are not comfortable with overt expressions of the Holy Spirit that came out of the Pentecostal movement while others find it essential to their belief practice. And yet both groups have found a home with us. They all want to worship together, so we find a way where some would say there is no way.

It is precisely the appreciation of Anabaptist principles of following Jesus held in balance with the spontaneity of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit that equips me to help lead an international church.

That kind of love and appreciation of differences is the very message of the gospel and is what keeps us fellowshiping together despite our multi-cultural backgrounds. And I believe learning this balance will thrust us into the next big movement of God on this earth.



Kellie Swope is a member of the leadership team of Soli Deo Church, a Mennonite church in Halle, Germany.

Brazil

Exuberance for the Spirit

by Arthur Duck

For many Brazilian evangelicals, Pentecost is not a one-time event of the past. There is a clear awareness of the Spirit in daily life. About 70 percent of evangelical churches in Brazil are Pentecostal and the others are influenced by the Pentecostal movement.

Factors that influence our view of Pentecost

We don't have a tradition of critical thinking in Brazil. We live with the expectation that God will change my life through a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced through the first outpouring at Pentecost.

Another factor that influences us is Spiritism. With influences from the practices of Umbanda, when supernatural manifestation occurs, Brazilians tend to accept what is going on without questioning or discerning if we are dealing with the Holy Spirit or other spirits.

When we hear reports of supernatural manifestations in a church, we want to see it with our own eyes to experience what God is doing today. We often read without historical awareness. In Acts 2, we skip past the wind and the proclamation aspect: the "real thing" is tongues – proof that God is at work and that we are his special people. If it happened in those days, it could and should happen again to us today (Mark 16:17–18).

This perception is so strong that those who are not of the Pentecostal camp feel they are missing something. Often, as some ask themselves why these supernatural manifestations do not occur to them or in their church today, they blame themselves for not being open for the Spirit. Others become defensive, asking if the manifestations (tongues, healing, prophecy) really change the lives of those who claim to have these gifts.

Seeking the Holy Spirit

However, neither response helps us to understand what Luke was trying to tell us.

Our reading then becomes not a search for the meaning in the text, but a meaning "for me."

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we are often not really concerned with the Holy Spirit, but what the Spirit can give us: power.

The same worldview dominates our reading of the Gospels. There is no concern with the crucial question the Gospel writers try to get across: "Who in the world is this Jesus?" Our reading is: "What can this Jesus do for me?"

What scares us is that this question already appears in the Gospels when Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to perform a miracle before them (Matthew 12:39), or Herod, when he wished to be entertained with a miracle (Luke 23:8–9). The answer Jesus gave the Jewish leaders was the sign of Jonah, and to Herod, Jesus did not speak a word.

In our pragmatic search for the power of the Spirit, we look for personal benefits from the Spirit instead of authentic worship. In this sense, we need to hear the words of A.W. Tozer: "Whoever seeks God as a means toward desired ends will not find God." This raises an intimidating question: If these people don't find God, whom or what are they finding?

The work of the Spirit as transformation

Nevertheless, God's grace is beyond our shortcomings. Even though we all read the Bible with our presuppositions, God reaches out and changes lives. Those who are open to the work of the Spirit, through the Word, personal conversations, daily situations, even supernatural manifestations, and try to discern what God is doing are being transformed. Often, we would hope this growing in faith would be much faster, however the maturing process is slow.

We are not easily changed from our view that God is at our disposal to satisfy our needs. We must learn what the Bible teaches about the Christian life, accompanied by people who model this lifestyle. We don't need heroes; we need

Those who are open to the work of the Spirit, through the Word, personal conversations, daily situations, even supernatural manifestations, and try to discern what God is doing are being transformed.

everyday Christians who defy the success models and have Jesus as their model.

I rejoice at the fact that as my fellow Brazilians – both Pentecostals and Mennonites – open themselves to the work of the Spirit in their lives, they are convinced of their sins (John 16:8) and guided by the Spirit to all truth (John 16:13).

We know that the work of the Spirit is far from finished in our own lives and pray that the transformation process may go on till "we become in every way like Christ" (Ephesians 4:15, New Living Translation). This might take more than a generation. We are called to model our lives according to Jesus and influence those around us. Only God can change the world.



Arthur Duck is on faculty at Faculdade Fidelis, a Mennonite Brethren-affiliated Bible school in Curitiba, Brazil. A version of this article appeared in the *MB Herald*, 1 June 2011.

Canada

The brightest and best

by Nikki White

It was 20 years ago when my husband and I were mourning the messy demise of our church, which had destabilized during the renewalism of the 1990s.

I felt both cynical and yet wistful, regarding the charismatic. In search of sanity, stability and solid teaching, a nearby Mennonite Brethren church caught our attention. Could this be home?

Inwardly, I winced. I did not want to give up the adventurous rush of the prophetic, the ecstatic peaks of worship, the intensely personal encounters in prayer ministry. The fun.

Some of my peers made their way to the nearest Pentecostal church, only to complain about the lack of sound teaching. Others went mainstream evangelical, only to complain about the lack of Spirit-infused life. Were we doomed to join some secretly seething remnant of disgruntled spiritual elitists who did nothing but complain in whatever church they found themselves?

We prayed, we took a deep breath, we went MB.

It was not what I expected.

Charismatic Anabaptists

That first Sunday I saw hands raised in worship, elders offering prayer and a strong community focus that challenged my self-absorption. The pastor had also just returned from a YWAM experience with a desire to see the Holy Spirit move in his church. Closet Pentecostal? Nope. Mennonite Brethren.

The Mennonite Brethren church was birthed 155 years ago, offspring of an unlikely marriage between a staunch Mennonite ‘mother’ and a more charismatic ‘father’ (a hybrid of German Baptist and passionate Lutheran Pietism); their union produced an unwieldy lovechild prone to literal jumping for joy.

Early Brethren were an evangelistic force to be reckoned with, focused upon an intensely personal experience of God.

‘Menno Mom’ was a little taken aback. She waited to see what would happen; when sensuality and sin emerged, she clamped down on excess emotionalism

with a heavy hand. Since then, her jumping child has been significantly more restrained.

But in Canada, some MB toes are twitching. What gives?

Spirit-filled diversity

It was only in the late 19th century that Canada actively encouraged immigration from outside the sphere of white, English-speaking Europeans. A post-WWII economic boom then led to broadening the palette of acceptable immigrant hue to include Asians, Sub-Saharan Africans, and South Americans. The Canadian MB church - having sent missionaries abroad for years - began to engage the diaspora on their doorstep, resulting in ethnic ministries within churches and the planting of ethno-specific churches.

Metaphorically, the ecclesial potluck had theological dim sum, papadum, and tortilla added to the farmer sausage and platz.

Despite long-held misgivings regarding traditional Pentecostalism, atrophied MB “jumping” muscles flexed under the subtle but increasing influence of those from the Global South, where Pentecostalism is a dominant expression of Protestant Christianity. Today, that charismatic

Today, that charismatic influence is like a sparking flint in search of well-laid logs, and within the wistfully warm but solidly constructed MB hearth lie embers of the fire that once birthed us.

influence is like a sparking flint in search of well-laid logs, and within the wistfully warm but solidly constructed MB hearth lie embers of the fire that once birthed us.

Some churches ignite, some - like ours - do a slow burn.

Twenty years have passed since our first MB Sunday. Recently, the current lead pastor confessed his longing for renewal. He identified the missing element in his life - already rich in prayer, the Word, and community - as risk. In fall of 2021, he launched a sermon series on the gift of the Holy Spirit, catalyzing us toward charismatic expressions that would honour MB theology and values.

What does that look like?

Imagine: dynamic contemporary worship with carefully chosen lyrics that express ancient truths; subjective spiritual insights discerned through a community hermeneutic; diverse stances on theological non-essentials meeting with neither hostility nor avoidance; radical social justice initiatives championed by radical peacemakers; the Word preached boldly but with humble acknowledgement of Scriptural ambiguities; prayer that is audacious yet eschews transactional agendas; spiritual gifts caught and taught through intentional training, and space for personal encounters with God through prayer ministry.

When the brightest and best of global Pentecostalism merges with brightest and best of MB heritage, hopes should soar. What better context in which to become a people who will not only engage in renewal, but pastor it well?



Nikki White is a writer with MULTIPLY (the international Mennonite Brethren sending agency), and author of [Identity in Exodus](#). She attends North Langley Community Church in B.C., Canada, where she oversees curriculum development and training for prayer ministry.



**Indonesia
2022**

**05-10
07 2022**

bersama-sama mengikuti Yesus melintas batas
sesarengan ngetut wuri Gusti Yesus nratas wewates
following Jesus together across barriers
seguir a Jesús juntos, superando las barreras
suivre Jésus ensemble à travers les frontières

Assembly to sustainably return trash to the environment

In Indonesia, a country where sorting and proper treatment of trash is rare, how do we run the Assembly sustainably?

In 2019, Bangun P. Nugroho, a member of Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI Church) Holy Stadium in Semarang, Central Java, realized that landfills are filling up fast with a mix of organic and inorganic waste. The lack of sorting and treatment releases a stench to the surrounding community. So PT AL TSA, the company he worked for, did a feasibility study into waste management, got proper licenses and in March 2020 started accepting the food and green waste from a local public university in Semarang to be treated.

“Every day, the university produces tonnes of mixed wastes, among them plastic, paper, green waste and food waste - all of which used to end up in landfills,” Bangun P. Nugroho says.

PT AL TSA started to sort them, turning the green waste - the result of plant pruning and grass cutting, into compost. Meanwhile, food and other organic waste are treated with maggots (larvae of black flies). The maggots feed on rotting food, getting rid of the stench and reducing the volume of the waste. The processed organic waste is then sifted and sold as fertilizer.

In addition, because organic waste is fertile breeding ground for maggots, excess larvae could also be sold to chicken and fish farms as high protein feed, free of antibiotics. “It is an end-to-end solution. The organic waste becomes fertilizer for the farms and food for the maggots. The maggots become a good diet for chicken and fish that we eat. And we return our food waste to the maggots,” Bangun P. Nugroho adds.

At the same that PT AL TSA was venturing into the treatment of compostable waste, the staff of the Mennonite World Conference Assembly was also looking for a partner who could help them dispose of the waste the Assembly will generate. Having found a partner for compostable dishes, the staff kept looking for different solutions for how to dispose of their compostable waste. After months of brainstorming, and having considered creating their own business, the staff heard of the work that PT AL TSA was doing, and the relationship between Bangun P. Nugroho and the Assembly staff was born.

Other than processing the waste of the university, PT AL TSA takes on multiple clients, many of them restaurants, cafeterias and hotels. Mennonite World Conference will partner with them to ensure that the waste produced by Indonesia 2022 is properly treated and returned to the ecosystem sustainably.

“All I want is for things that people throw away to be returned to the environment in a form that is acceptable to them,” Bangun P. Nugroho concludes.

Support Assembly by going to mwc-cmm.org/donate, click DONATE NOW and indicate that your donation is for Assembly.



PT AL TSA Composting
Photos: Liesa Unger



**Indonesia
2022**



**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

ASSEMBLY

Assembly Scattered

Before and after Assembly Gathered; various locations in Indonesia

1-4
July
2022

Global Youth Summit (GYS)

Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia
Theme:
Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship.

5-10
July
2022

Assembly Gathered

Salatiga & Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia
Theme:
Following Jesus together across barriers

Assembly Gathered Program

July Daily Themes

- 05 Tuesday (opening): following Jesus together across barriers
- 06 Wednesday: following Jesus, learning together
- 07 Thursday: following Jesus, living together
- 08 Friday: following Jesus, caring together
- 09 Saturday: following Jesus, celebrating together
- 10 Sunday (closing): following Jesus together



Semarang Marina
Photo: Aliko Sunawang

Latest Update on Assembly On-site
MWC Assembly in Indonesia is welcoming 700 on-site participants with the option of additional Indonesian guests at the opening and closing services based on local government guidelines.

The Assembly will take place in Salatiga, Central Java. Lodging will be possible in the hotels at the Assembly site. Some parts of the program will be streamed from satellite locations and held online for participants to get to know more about Indonesia. Global Youth Summit (GYS) participation will be limited to a maximum of 120 participants, including official delegates from each church, and will not have a virtual component.

For more information and updates, please visit the [website](#).



MWC Workshops
Photo: Zoom Screenshot

Staff and volunteers arriving in Indonesia to prepare for the next few months of work in preparation for the Assembly

We are excited to announce that part of our assembly staff has arrived in Indonesia! As the date for Assembly continues to get closer, we are thrilled to be able to share together with different food, stories, and our hopes for Assembly. Below, you can see photos of their first meal together and staff, volunteers, and YAMENers arriving at Semarang.



Staff, Volunteers, and YAMENers arriving in Semarang

Online Workshops

Assembly will be offering both on-site and online workshops where you can share and participate in a variety of different themes including creative ministry, interfaith dialogue, baptism, peace and justice and creation care.

For those who participate online, you can access the workshops through our virtual hub, where we will be holding these spaces at different times of the day to include all possible time zones.



Call out to local volunteers & international volunteers

The MWC Assembly is looking for volunteers! If you are interested in being a part of the Assembly as a volunteer, whether that means helping at the Assembly, or from home, we currently have 3 areas where you could help us the most.

We are looking for volunteers that are willing to help for 4-6 hours during the day at Assembly, international or local volunteers that are willing to spend one month in Indonesia to help serve in different capacities for Assembly, and also volunteers who are able to serve with tech support, interpretation or communication from their homes.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Assembly, Follow this link!

<https://t2m.io/WtS8f3HQ>

Assembly Registration

Are you ready to sign up for Assembly? If so, please feel free to visit our registration website for all of the information you need regarding prices, dates and the different options we are providing. At our registration website, you can register for the online event now, and the on-site registration went live on the 8 March 2022. Once you have registered for the online event, you will still have the option to change your participation to on-site.

<https://t2m.io/LiKcOZ9g>

Assembly Tours: How lifelong relationships become real

Assembly tours have something for everyone! Each afternoon visitors will have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of attractions around the host city of Salatiga. Some of the highlights include the old city of Semarang and the Banaran Coffee Plantation.

Before and after Assembly Gathered; various locations in Indonesia, Assembly Scattered will provide the opportunity for participants to visit MWC-related congregations throughout Indonesia. Being the oldest Mennonite community outside of Europe and North America, the MWC-related congregations of Indonesia offer an amazing perspective of the history of the Mennonite church in Indonesia, as well as a glimpse of the churches that are shaping its future.



Lawang Sewu colonial building in Semarang
Photo: Visual Karsa

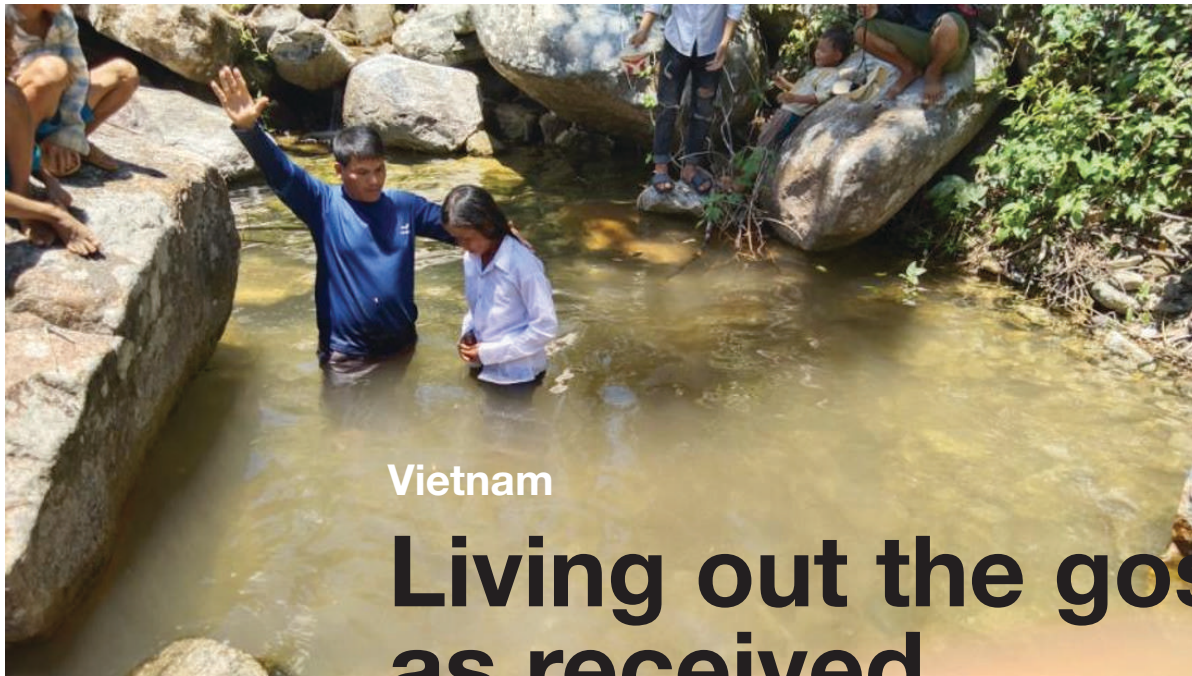
Youth Program

During Assembly, the youth will have a special time together where they will be able to explore biblical messages, enjoy inspiring music, play, and serve together. During the week the youth will explore the topics of learning, living, caring, celebrating and following Jesus together.

Explore the site on a regular basis and discover more exciting options as there will be tons of fun to be had!



Indonesia
2022



Pastor Cao performs an outdoor baptism in Vietnam.

Photos courtesy of EMM

Vietnam

Living out the gospel as received

The Mennonite believers in Vietnam know with certainty they are saved, and they live to express the gift of salvation from God. This gives believers confidence to speak about Christ and the way of Jesus. “We teach salvation by grace through faith,” say Mennonite pastors in Vietnam. “This is a gift of God.”

History

There are two expressions of Anabaptism in Vietnam: Hội Thánh Mennonite Việt Nam (Vietnam Mennonite Church - VMC) was founded in 1964 by the Vietnam Mennonite Mission, a ministry of Eastern Mennonite Missions begun in 1957. After a time of inactivity following the change in government in 1975, it reconvened in the 1980s and was recognized officially by the current government in 2007.

The Vietnam Evangelical Mennonite Church (unregistered) had its beginnings in 1998 and organized formally in 2004, combining several indigenous expressions encouraged by Vietnamese Mennonites from Canada.

Jesus at the centre

In Vietnam, what it is to be an Anabaptist-Mennonite is presented as simply living out the gospel as received. Jesus is the centre of our faith, community is the centre of our life and reconciliation is the centre of our work. This approach taught by North American pastor and teacher Palmer Becker resonates well with Vietnamese people.

Mennonite pastors and leaders share this message their preaching. It is easy to understand and attractive. People inside and outside the church find this resonates in their hearts.

Peace and gentleness from the nonviolent teachings of Anabaptism are also part of the transformative message that reaches Vietnamese Mennonites and shapes how they deal with one another. “It affects all areas of life,” say the Mennonite pastors. “Following Jesus in peace brings reconciliation to every body.”

For non-believers, it is freeing to talk about sin and to learn how Jesus brings liberation from sin. Traditional evangelical church members find this approach is liberating.

This message is also attractive to indigenous house church groups who are not part of any network of churches. As a result of hearing this articulation of faith, some ask about joining the Mennonite denomination.

“To demonstrate our beliefs, we live out those beliefs in Christ daily,” say Vietnamese Mennonite pastors. “Christian faith is a ‘lived-out’ faith, not just a system of beliefs.”

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Lived out faith

In the Northern part of Vietnam, some Mennonite churches are very hot in evangelism, testifying to their faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. The women evangelize daily while shopping in the market. Some are vendors who share the gospel with their customers. They see healings as they share the gospel. When people come to believe in Jesus, church member evangelists bring them to the pastor for teaching.

In the Central and Southern parts of the country, there are nine organized mission teams of Mennonite church members who go out on mission every month.



A Mennonite church service in Hai Phong, Vietnam.

Photos courtesy of EMM

There is a team on the border of Cambodia, one in the most westerly part (Kien Giang).

Pastor Hoang Bich leads a team in Da-nang reaching out to the Ka-tu ethnic group. They are also working with a university student group.

One team in Quang Ngai (Central Region) is very active.

Additionally, there is an Eastern region team, a Daklak team, two teams in Soc Trang, and a Ca Mau team.

The teams do house-to-house outreach. They reach out to people they know, family members, and people in the designated provinces. Once they have a group who has shown interest, they start a Bible study for preparation for baptism.

In the most southern province (Ca Mau), Pastor Quyen leads a team. He dedicated his life to serve Jesus after his daughter took ill and had been pronounced dead by the doctor, but came back to life as his wife continued to pray.

He is very active and has gathered a group of people for Bible study. The study group is very disciplined, almost like medieval monastery.

In the era of COVID-19, Pastor Quyen preaches every other day on the internet (via Zoom). His virtual congregation is so large – nearly 1 000 people listening in at one time – it pushes the platform limit.

Among those who are encountering Christ through the ministry of Pastor Quyen, there are demonstrations of the Holy Spirit and miracles. Some people choose to move to be near his church. He also contacts other local churches to meet face-to-face with people who have connected via his Zoom ministry.

In the Quang Ngai, Soc Trang, Thu Duc, and Binh Thanh areas of Vietnam, the members are reaching out to the poor.

Although the churches are not large in size, they are large in impact.

Crossing barriers

Mennonite churches take root in the countryside and the city. The primary minority ethnic groups the VMC is reaching out to are S'tieng, Kor, Bahnar, H'mong, Ka-tu, Ede, De, Khmer, Cham. Today, about 50 percent of the memberships are from at least 10 different ethnic minority groups. The other half are Vietnamese.

Vietnam

MWC member church

Hội Thánh Mennonite Việt Nam / Vietnam Mennonite Church

Total baptized members	5 500
Total congregations	72

Non-member church

Mennonite Church in Vietnam (Unregistered)

Total baptized members	1 800
Total congregations	35

Source: Gerry Keener, EMM



A Mennonite evangelist prays with a community member in Quang Ninh, Vietnam.

Photos courtesy of EMM

The urban groups reach out to rural ethnic persons who move to the city for work, education and opportunities.

The church members follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. "We are free and open to embrace all the gifts of the Spirit, according to Bible teachings," say the Vietnamese pastors. This is in contrast to the traditional evangelical churches who tend to discourage or not recognize some of the gifts of the Spirit.

Although it is not formalized, Vietnamese Mennonite churches also follow Jesus across barriers by recognizing women to serve as pastors and in leadership.

Challenges and opportunities

Like many fast-growing churches, their strength presents a difficulty: the church is growing fast, so they need a way to train leaders quickly. COVID-19 hampers some of the financial activities of the church as members livelihoods are affected by the slowed down economy.

Many people – even in the rural areas – have been able to get vaccinated. "This brings hope," the pastors say.

VMC does not have an office and training centre. When COVID-19 shutdowns are in the past, the need for a centre will be more pressing. The church's faithful outreach among those who are poor is growing the church, but its financial capacity remains small.

With support from Vietnamese Mennonites in the USA, the churches were able to reach out to their neighbours with medical, social help and food during the worst of pandemic infections. "It demonstrates the heart of loving of Anabaptists for the people in Vietnam," say the Mennonite pastors.

Although COVID-19 curtailed some possibilities, it also created new opportunities for online study, training and fellowship. Bible studies and other training have been occurring via Zoom, which brings together people from a distance – including East and West – with minimal time and financial cost.

This is also an opportunity for youth. "We envision involving younger folks from other countries who have a heart for mission to relate to the youth leaders in Vietnam," say the Mennonite pastors. "Could teenagers in the Mennonite World Conference community regularly connect with youth in Vietnam?"

The youth of Vietnam, many of whom know how to speak English, are ready to maximize on the internet connected world, in fellowship, learning and reaching out. "This has potential to turn missions upside-down. This is an opportunity for youth around the globe," say the Mennonite pastors.

The global family

VMC remembers with fondness the MWC fraternal delegation visit from five continents in 2008 on the occasion of their legal recognition by the Vietnam government authorities. This was very meaningful as the MWC delegation spent

three days with church leaders and visited congregations, demonstrating foot washing, among other things.

VMC was happy to become a member church of MWC in 2009 in Paraguay. "We appreciate the opportunities for fellowship with believers around the globe on the occasions of General Council and General Assembly meetings. May these relationships increase and deepen," say the Mennonite pastors.

They are eager to connect with other Mennonites close by within Asia, and to develop more connections with Eastern Mennonite Missions in the USA.

Young people have participated with the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), which first made its presence known in Vietnam in 1954. "Several of our youth have benefited significantly through this program," they say.

A growing church

The Mennonite church in Vietnam is a testimony that God is working. "The Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC) senses God's favour at this time," say the pastors. COVID-19 does not hamper the simple message: we are all sinners and need Jesus. With Jesus, people enjoy newfound freedom, peace and protection.

During this pandemic, many people suffer mental problems due to uncertainties. Standing on the rock of Christ Jesus, Vietnamese Mennonites find comfort and reassurance that they bring to others. "There is no need to worry; God cares for you!"

Article contributors: Vietnamese pastors Huynh Dinh Nghia, president, VMC; Huynh Minh Dang, general secretary, VMC; and Tuyen Nguyen, bishop, LMC – a fellowship of Anabaptist churches responded to questions from Gerry H. Keener, international worker with Eastern Mennonite Mission.



Read more:
For a more complete history of Mennonites in Vietnam, read Chapter 9 in *Churches Engage Asian Traditions* Global Mennonite History Series: Asia;
© 2011 by Good Books.



Renewal 2022: Following Jesus Together

JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang, Indonesia
10 July 2022

Renewal 2028 is a 10-year series of events commemorating the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement.

Join us Sunday 10 July 2022 at Assembly 17 – in Indonesia or online – for reflection and inspiration on **Following Jesus Together** as Anabaptists: yesterday, today and in the ages to come.

Share the impact

“Thank you for sending!”
“News from *Courier* will add faith and knowledge to us.”

These are responses we’ve received after *Courier* brings you testimonies, teaching and news from the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family around the world.

How have you been moved by the sharing you read in *Courier*? How have you shared that with your wider church community?

Tell us what you learned – and what you want to learn more about!

We welcome your feedback.

By email: info@mwccmm.org



On our website: mwccmm.org/sharetheimpact

Facebook: @MennoniteWorldConference

Via Instagram: @mwccmm

From our leaders



The Limmat River in Switzerland where early Anabaptists were drowned as punishment for their rebellious re-baptisms.

Photo: J. Nelson Kraybill

Like the chambers of a heart, the four commissions of Mennonite World Conference serve the global community of Anabaptist-related churches, in the areas of deacons, faith and life, peace, mission. Commissions prepare materials for consideration by the General Council, give guidance and propose resources to member churches, and facilitate MWC-related networks or fellowships working together on matters of common interest and focus. In the following, one of the commissions shares a message from their ministry focus.

An occasion for confession and transformation

On May 29 2025 – three years from now – members of the MWC General Council, ecumenical guests, and a host of friends from around the world will gather in Zurich, Switzerland, for a day-long commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the first baptisms that marked the beginning of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement.

The MWC Faith and Life Commission is looking forward to that event in Switzerland. But we also know that historical celebrations are complicated.

After all, the Anabaptist world looks very different today than it did 500 years ago. The majority of Anabaptists today live far from Europe in Asia, Africa and Latin America, in cultural contexts that are vastly different from the 16th century.

A focus on history can easily shade into hero worship – a focus on earthly figures rather than on Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Preserving historical memories can become a form of nostalgia, or a defense of the dead weight of tradition and the status quo.

Several years ago, the Faith and Life Commission asked one of our members, Hanspeter Jecker, a Swiss Mennonite historian, to reflect on the place of history for Mennonite World Conference as a global communion. That document – “**The Anabaptist Tradition: Reclaiming its Gifts, Heeding its Weaknesses**” – is now part

of a rich collection of Teaching Resources available in the three official languages on the MWC website.

The short document begins with a brief historical overview of the Anabaptist movement and its transformation into a global church. It then identifies seven theological themes that form the core of the “Anabaptist tradition” – motifs that you could expect to find in all of our member groups, albeit with different emphases and in a colorful variety of cultural expressions.

Finally – and significantly! – the document also names several “weaknesses and deficits” of the Anabaptist tradition, recognizing that our strengths also have shadow sides that need to be recognized and confessed.

“The Anabaptist Tradition: Reclaiming its Gifts, Heeding its Weaknesses” provides a useful roadmap for MWC as we prepare to celebrate the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in 2025. That celebration will be an opportunity to reaffirm the distinctive theological convictions that bind us together. But it will also be an occasion for confession and transformation as we share together in a tradition that is always being renewed.



John D. Roth is secretary of the Faith and Life Commission. He lives in Goshen, Indiana, USA, and is a member of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship.

Meet your Executive Committee

An **Executive Committee** is elected from the General Council and meets annually. Two members from each continental region are elected from the General Council; a president and vice-president are also elected by the General Council. A president-elect begins a term three years before the handover of responsibilities. The treasurer and general secretary are also members of the Executive Committee. See the October 2021 issue of *Courier* to meet the officers.

Africa representatives



Samson Omondi

Congregation: Majiwa Mennonite Church, Kisumu, Kenya

"It is an honour to serve the global Church through MWC because it provides an excellent opportunity to share experiences and ideas from varied cultures all over the world."

Asia/Pacific representatives



Paul Phinehas

Congregation: Gilgal Mission Trust Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India

"I am grateful to be part of MWC because we can do more together than we can as individual flock, and we gather together to worship God in the ways he has exposed in the Bible."



MZ Ichsanudin

Congregation: GITJ Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

It is an honour to be involved in the ministry of the church globally through Mennonite World Conference (MWC) because organizationally, MWC is the only forum for churches that specifically promote peace, not only on a small scale, but on a world level; between faiths, between tribes and nations. How to achieve peace without going to war using weapons and politics is a big challenge for MWC. We do not only think for ourselves but for all human beings on this earth.

Europe representatives



Alexander Neufeld

Congregation: Evangelisch-mennonitische Freikirche Dresden, Germany

I am grateful to be part of MWC because it boosts my sense of belonging to a wonderful family of faith and provides me with an opportunity to meet and to interact with so many loving and interesting people. My prayer for the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church is that we may glorify Christ and make known the Gospel of Jesus and his way of relating and living.



Wieteke van der Molen

Congregation: Doopsgezind Gemeente Schoorl, Netherlands

*The most beautiful thing in MWC is that we try: try to reach out, to truly listen (to each other, ourselves, God), to see Christ looking at us through the eyes of a brother or sister. We fail utterly and completely and constantly. In understanding, in communicating, in truly helping each other, in creating a safe space for **all** of our brothers and sisters to join in that one story about God and humankind. And still we try. It is this trying and failing and trying again, that builds the kingdom of God.*

North America representatives



Lisa Carr Pries

Congregation: Nith Valley Mennonite Church, New Hamburg, Canada

As a volunteer, I desire to engage people in the vision of Mennonite World Conference by holding out Jesus' hope and Christ's light so that they are transformed, known deeply as God's beloved children and can notice God's activity.

Caribbean, Central and South America representatives



Carlos Martínez García

Congregation: Fraternidad Cristiana/Vida Nueva (CIEAMM), Mexico

It is a great privilege and blessing to get to know the challenges and opportunities that our global family faces. It is enriching to share our experiences and projects related to being Christ followers in an increasingly diverse world.



Juan Silverio Verón Aquino

Congregation: Iglesia Maranata de los Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren), Asunción, Paraguay

My prayer for the global Anabaptist church is that it continues to carry Christ's peace to every corner of the Earth.

Vacant **

Africa

*Steven Mang'ana Watson died 4 March 2021

North America

*Bill Braun's term came to an end in December 2021 when his local congregation Willow Avenue Mennonite was suspended from membership in the US Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.



Photo: Lorenzo Fellicyando

Online Prayer Hour

“In this one hour, a blanket of prayer is laid upon the world,” says Henk Stenvers, Netherlands; Deacons Commission secretary.

Visit mwc-cmm.org/online-prayer-hour-registration to register for the next online prayer meeting.



Next events

- Friday, 20 May 2022
- Friday, 16 September 2022
- Friday, 18 November 2022



YABs Fellowship Week at GYS: Global Youth Summit 2022

1-4 July 2022

“Sealed in the Spirit”
Ephesians 1:13-14



Peace Sunday 2022 18 September 2022

Being a new creation in the midst of external turmoil

- Matthew 5
- Mark 7:24-30
- Jeremiah 2:4-7

Indonesia 2022: less on-site, more creative options

How will we gather for Assembly 17?

The Executive Committee has opted for limited on-site attendees and many options for online attendees at the hybrid Assembly 17. MWC Assembly is hosted by the three Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonite synods in Central Java, Indonesia, 5-10 July 2022.

MWC Assembly 17 in Indonesia will welcome 700 on-site participants with the option of additional Indonesian guests for opening night and closing service. Due to COVID-19 regulations, 700 is the number currently possible.

Registration for online participation opened in December 2021. Registration for on-site Assembly will start 8 March 2022 at 22:00 Western Indonesian time.

Mennonite World Conference's Assembly, which normally gathers thousands of Anabaptists from around the globe every six years, was postponed from 2021 to 2022 due to the pandemic.



Sangkakala Seminary (STT)

Photo: Ebenezer Mondez

Program

Sangkakala Seminary (STT), a JKI seminary located outside Salatiga, will host most of the plenary sessions. In addition, “satellite” meeting places at four local congregations will live-stream evening plenaries, while the international choir sings at STT. The closing service will be celebrated at JKI Holy Stadium in Semarang.

“This way, online participants can ‘travel’ with us to different places in Indonesia,” says Liesa Unger, MWC Chief International Events Officer.

- Most of the afternoon activities – including workshops, Global Church Village, fun and games, and children’s program – and lodging will take place at two hotels in Salatiga.
- Morning and late-night youth program will also take place at the hotel’s indoor and outdoor venues.

Registration categories

- A little less than half of the 700 registration spaces for on-site Assembly are reserved for Indonesian registrants, divided up between full participation and daily participation.
- The remaining registration spaces will be divided equally between the four registration categories (based on national GDP), to give members from each region opportunity to participate.

“This mode for Assembly increases complexities in planning, but offers more opportunity for local church members to engage with international visitors, creates more opportunities for online participants to get to know Indonesia and to respond faster to possible health concerns,” says Liesa Unger.

GYS

The Global Youth Summit on the theme “Life in the Spirit: Learn, Serve, Worship” will be attended by GYS delegates and 60 full-time participants 1-4 July 2022 in Salatiga, Central Java. Local Indonesian young adults can join for the evening worship organized by GYS delegates of different continents.

General Council and other meetings

- The General Council meetings that precede the Assembly will take place online.

“With additional visa required and quarantine periods changing frequently, the financial risk of ballooning lodging costs and rescheduling flights for more than 100 General Council delegates is too great,” says César García, MWC general secretary.

- Meetings involving the Executive Committee, Commission chairs and secretaries and MWC staff will take place in Indonesia. These groups, which normally meet face-to-face, have not been together in person since before the pandemic began.

Further information regarding workshops, network meetings, Assembly Scattered tours and lodging options will be posted on the registration site.

“We want as many people as possible to come,” says Paulus Widjaja, chair of the National Advisory Committee in Indonesia. “We first dreamed of it in Paraguay in 2009. The pandemic discouraged us but we are still very enthusiastic to bring people to Indonesia.”



Register here

President's column

Joy in the midst of suffering

Gratitude to God and the global Anabaptist church fill my heart as I complete my term as MWC president. This planet-wide church has become my home, and the assembly in Indonesia will be a reunion, a gathering of siblings. In a world fractured by war and pandemic, I long to bond with peacemaking and generous people from fifty-eight countries.

Christians are “aliens and exiles,” says the letter of 1 Peter. That brings to mind refugees and displaced persons from parts of the world where Anabaptists live today – including Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo and Venezuela. Elsewhere, Anabaptists and other Christians face abuse and church buildings burn. Early Anabaptists suffered martyrdom in Europe, and today martyrdom continues.

Responding to these crises, Anabaptists in multiple countries open their homes and wallets to assist persons seeking refuge. “Living hope,” as Peter calls it, inspires such love. Compassion modelled by Anabaptist sisters and brothers around the world inspires me to help receive refugees who are arriving in my homeland.

Joy abounds in 1 Peter, because building community among suffering people brings hope. “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people,” the author rejoices. Peter wrote his letter because Christians need the strength we find in fellowship, especially in hardship. Anabaptists today need to learn from and support each other.

Come to assembly in Indonesia in person or online! Join MWC online prayer gatherings! Contribute financially!

MWC involvement has been life-giving for me, reminding me that my deepest loyalty is not with nation or tribe, but with a global communion of people who know Jesus. Our citizenship is in the New Jerusalem, with people who follow the Lamb.

Thank you, sisters and brothers, for being family to each other. As Peter writes to “exiles of the Dispersion,” may God “restore, support, strengthen and establish” you.



J. Nelson Kraybill is president of MWC (2015–2022). He lives in Indiana, USA.



Mennonite Church Charam, India.

Photo supplied

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

Together across oceans

“Sometimes our faith community seems small and insular; [celebrating Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday] helped open eyes to the global family,” says Chani Wiens. The math teacher and chapel coordinator at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, used the Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday worship resource in a chapel service.

“Most of our students from Mennonite congregations have Russian Mennonite heritage so it’s great to show them how prevalent Anabaptism is around the world and that they are part of a large family,” says Chani Wiens.

MWC leaders preached in many congregations 23 January 2022, offering now-familiar online sermons in locations far from their homes on Anabaptist World

Fellowship Sunday.

It was a gift for Summit Mennonite Church in Ohio to host an MWC speaker, Europe regional representative José Arrais, on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday says pastor Christine Nafziger. “I felt especially blessed to have a connection with a brother in Christ from across the ocean – such a richness in hearing from his experience,” she says.

“When a part of the global church invites me to share about MWC, it energizes me knowing that we are connecting,” says Cynthia Peacock, MWC regional representative for Southern Asia, who spoke at several events over the weekend. “We grow stronger as a family by learning, sharing and walking together to bless and be blessed, extending God’s kingdom on earth.”

This year’s Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday theme was “Following Jesus together” – part of the Assembly theme. The resource materials were prepared by the host churches in Indonesia: Gereja Injil Tanah Jawa (GITJ), Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI), Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI).

Additionally, 33 videos of Scripture reading in 16 languages and greetings from 11 congregations or groups around the world brought global visitors into local congregations across oceans and borders.

How did your church or school celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday? Send us your stories and photos. Say hi to the global family: we welcome your 5-second greeting videos.



Want to invite an MWC speaker to your local congregation?

Be a part of MWC’s work

You make a difference in the Mennonite World Conference family through your prayers and financial gifts.

Your contributions help to

- support and sustain the worldwide community of Anabaptist churches grounded in Jesus
- grow a thriving global communion through MWC commissions, networks and gatherings
- uphold service and witness in our faith communities

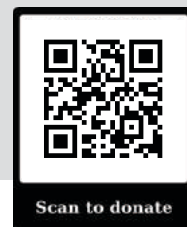
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Photo: Karla Braun

Internal Dialogues

“Mennocostal” – Pentecostal Mennonites – may be the best characterization of most Anabaptists in Mennonite World Conference today. The influence of Pentecostalism in Mennonite congregations worldwide is an overwhelming reality. In their study of Mennonite World Conference churches, Conrad Kanagy, Elizabeth Miller, and John D. Roth conclude, “One of the defining differences between MWC members in the Global North and the Global South is their experience of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, with Europeans and North Americans much less likely to identify with these experiences... Pentecostalism is the most rapidly growing expression of Christianity in the world, and Anabaptists are not foreigners to this reality.”¹

Pentecostalism’s influence in our lives has pushed many of us towards an internal dialogue between the Anabaptist tradition and the new Pentecostal tendencies that emerge in some parts of the world. In my faith journey, that dialogue looks like the following so far:

Do I believe in miracles and the gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy and tongues?

Yes, I do. I have experienced them.

I also think, as *Encanto* (a recent movie about Colombia) says, people themselves are God’s miracles. People are more important than the gifts they bring to the table. In Jesus’ words, at the end of the Sermon of the Mount, you can do all sorts of supernatural things, but if you do not do what he says, you do not know him (Matthew 7:21-23).

I also believe illness and suffering are everyday human experiences that God may transform for our wellbeing and growth. God does not promise to remove those experiences from our lives. Instead, God promises to walk with us through them.

Do I believe that God wants us to prosper?

Yes, I do. Financial prosperity is one of the many things in which followers of Jesus may thrive.

However, such economic prosperity is not the result of a special prayer technic. It is not related to an individualistic consumerist desire, and it is not a reward God gives to those who provide their tithes to force God’s hand.

Financial prosperity results from a simple lifestyle, the consequence of living a life that cares for creation and is aware of our responsibility on the environmental crisis.

We communally experience financial prosperity. It happens when followers of Christ share their possessions and needs. Anabaptists understand that according to the Book of Acts, a consequence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is financial sharing in the community of the Spirit (Acts 2:44).

In addition to prophecy, miracles, and other mystical experiences, a life of generosity and sharing of wealth has to be a fruit of the Spirit. Only God’s presence can overcome the natural human tendency toward egocentrism and self-satisfaction. Only God’s presence overcomes consumerism and materialism, creating an alternative community to the society.

Do I believe that God empowers leaders with the Holy Spirit?

Yes, I do. When the Holy Spirit fills a leader, they serve others and do not look for recognition, honour or positions of power. A leader that serves in God’s Spirit solves conflicts in the way of Jesus and never takes the initiative to fragment Christ’s body. Divisions and power struggles never are a path of a leader that follows God’s Spirit.

Do I believe in peacemaking and reconciliation?

Yes, I do. Life in the Spirit is a life of peacemaking and restorative justice. It is possible to be an activist that promotes justice and peace without following Jesus. However, to be so in the way of Jesus, we need to depend on the Holy Spirit and have a solid personal relationship with the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Those are some of my internal, personal thoughts about my commitment to follow Jesus in the Anabaptist tradition and my experience of doing so in the context of modern Pentecostalism in the Americas. But of course, these opinions may change because following Christ implies movement and growth. So, likewise, they may change when tested and submitted to the community of Christ’s followers, the church. As vital as they are, individual beliefs are never enough to witness a life fulfilled with the Spirit. Only a life submitted to the community of believers bears witness to God’s presence in our lives.

In this issue of Courier, internal dialogues open the way to intercultural, inter-Anabaptist conversations about the influence of Pentecostalism in our global communion and our experience of life in the Spirit according to our Anabaptist tradition.

May the Spirit of God guide us to continue discovering in practice the implications of following Jesus in the power of God’s Spirit!

César García, MWC general secretary, originally from Colombia, lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

¹ Conrad Kanagy, Elizabeth Miller, and John D. Roth, *Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches* (Goshen, Ind.: Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism Goshen College, 2017), 23.