

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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From the editor



The Canadian Prairies can seem like a hard place to live. It gets very cold in wintertime. The growing season is short, and the crop options are limited.

For Prairie dwellers in Canada, it's possible to think the shift in weather patterns – year after year, winters are milder than we remember – as a good thing. Who wants to ride a bike over snow and ice when you could drive in a heated car instead? Why should we inconvenience ourselves to care about the earth?

Scientists are sounding alarm bells about the state of the earth. Whatever you call it, whatever you think caused it, scientists agree

that climate change is happening.

For Anabaptist Christians centred on Jesus, community and reconciliation, caring for God's creation is not a political action but a divine calling.

In our worship of God, we pay attention to the physical surroundings where we live. We thank God for his creative work, and uphold our responsibility as stewards. Our task of tending and caring is written throughout the Old Testament and the New, Ndunzi Muller writes in the feature article.

Similarly, we love people, made in God's image, whether they are nearby or far away.

Climate change causes people to suffer: often those with fewest resources to adapt or recover are the most affected. Increased frequency and severity of extreme weather patterns means storms are more destructive, droughts last longer and floods are more severe. Destroyed homes and livelihoods, hunger, displacement, even deaths result.

As Christians, we must be aware of how our actions have affected our neighbours locally and on the other side of the world, and begin to take different actions, large or small, to help rather than harm the environment.

In rural areas in the Philippines, Anabaptist-rooted organization Coffee for Peace teaches that the earth does not need to suffer for humans to make a living. They train farmers to work at peace with the land – and at peace with their neighbours and God.

Rebecca Froese in Germany has the opportunity to act on a large scale. A participant in the World Council of Churches, she attended the Paris climate accords to call for justice. And she also takes action in her local congregation with recycling and solar initiatives.

Similarly, José Antonio Vaca Bello acts in both ways in Colombia. He works with all kinds of allies to urge for moderation and better practices to halt environmental degradation from resource exploitation in his city. But he also acts within his local church, teaching that simple measures can make a difference.

Based in the USA, Mennonite Creation Care Network (mennocreationcare.org) provides resources for learning and for worship that can be downloaded from their website. Evangelical Christian and climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe posts videos on YouTube and Facebook to teach about the issues. From the grassroots, Carole Suderman writes tips on simple living for her local congregation, Boulder Mennonite in Colorado. Over 20 years, she has written nearly 1,000 suggestions for household practices, seasonal activities or advocacy. All these little steps are rooted in her Mennonite convictions of simplicity, responsibility to God's task for us, and love for people.

It's easy to feel hopeless or fatalistic when we consider the complexity of God's creation, and the changes it is undergoing due to human actions. Our calling to participate in the upside-down kingdom Jesus ushered in will not allow us to do nothing. The God who saves us also invites us to do his work on earth.

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

Cover Photo:

"Pitaya" also known as "dragon fruit" is a hardy, drought-resistant fruit with a forbidding exterior but soft, sweet and beautiful inside. "This fruit speaks to me of having been created with great intentionality by God the creator, the God of living water amid drought," says Jardely Martinez Franco of Colombia.

PHOTO: Jardely Martinez Franco

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Creation care: a biblical mandate



by Kukedila Nduzi Muller

At the beginning of this third millennium, humanity confronts serious ecological problems that threaten human life and all of creation. The consequences of global warming are perceptible in every country of the world: polluted air and water, serious flooding, extreme heat, etc.

In Africa, principally in sub-Saharan countries, populations are exposed to many diseases as a result of the deterioration of creation and conditions of life. Other parts of creation, both wild and domestic, such as fish and animals, birds, trees and rivers have not been spared. They are victims of human greed and foolishness. Yet, even as the Lord protects us, we must protect God's

creation by taking care of the earth and its inhabitants. This is the will of the creator.

The Bible and creation care

The Bible is not silent when it comes to the responsibility of human beings with regard to creation. It is so rich in lessons in this area that some have come to consider the Word of God as an ecological book, a manual that helps Christians live correctly on this earth, a manual that indicates "how to live on the earth in order not to be disoriented when arriving in heaven" (Dewitt).

Old Testament foundation

The Old Testament contains several passages that teach us about our responsibility toward creation. Nevertheless, the

The essence of the gospel is reconciliation; when Jesus reconciled the world to himself, that included creation, says Jardely Martinez Franco of Colombia. Like the moon and the red rocks in her photo, "the gospel is always present...in contrast to creation, between heaven and Earth."

PHOTO: Jardely Martinez Franco

most eloquent passage is Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." This verse lays the biblical foundation for the protection of creation. It underlines the cultural mandate of the mission of God entrusted to human beings in the garden of Eden. This dual missionary mandate consists of *tilling it and keeping it*.



The Creator's hand fashioned the wonders in the pictures Esther Martens recorded around her home in Saskatchewan. Though the Mennonite church near her closed, she continues to remain in touch with the global Anabaptist family.

PHOTO: Esther Martens

Tilling it – *àvâd*

Etymologically, this word originates from the root word *àvâd* meaning *till, serve, work*. Throughout the Old Testament, *àvâd* has two meanings that come down to the same thing: honour and glorify God.

In the first case, it is a question of offering an act of worship to God, to accomplish certain services of adoration. Secondly, it relates to the manual labour of humans to meet their own needs or the needs of the master in the case of servants. It is also a service provided to kings (Exodus 20:9; 30:16; Leviticus 25:39; Deuteronomy 28:23; Psalm 128:2; 24:1–2; Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:58; 2 Thessalonians 3:8–9, 11).

From this perspective, the human person is not created to do nothing. Labour is a necessary part of human nature, something that develops intelligence, ingenuity and the forces of energy and will, as well as those of the body (Rochedieu). The human person is first called to work, because it is the condition *sine qua non* for all development. A human being continues the work of God through labour, because God wants the person to prosper. The apostle Paul even says “anyone unwilling to work should not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

One should underline that in the beginning, manual labour was neither a curse nor the consequence of sin. It is a divine institution. Labour comes from God, because God worked and continues to work.

The term *àvâd*, understood as a service to offer, brings us back to our responsibility to worship God. We know that true worship consists of putting oneself in the service of others for good (Isaiah 58:6–7; James 1:27); to till the soil means to obey the will of God. On this subject, Bible commentator Rochedieu says, “there is a close analogy between tilling, worship and culture. Putting the mission to good use results necessarily in service offered to God for God’s glory and honour and for the well-being and integrity of all creatures, asking God for bread while at the same time working to obtain it.”



Jepara, Indonesia, is known as a carving town. Yanto Bengadi produces a lot of carvings for home decoration, mostly on floral themes. "I am very confident that we must care for and preserve God's creation for the sake of our generation," says the member of the Mennonite church GITJ Sukodono.

PHOTO: Yanto Bengadi

Keeping it – *shamar*

This verb means to keep, survey, watch over, protect, conserve, hold onto, conserve the memory, observe, notice, hold. This verb is used 126 times in the Pentateuch, 128 times in the Prophets, and 165 times elsewhere in Scripture. In the Genesis 2:15 passage, *shamar* takes on the sense of survey, preserve, care for.

From this perspective, the task of human beings is to protect the garden from an enemy of a completely different nature who aspires to become its master and will appear without delay. This task given to Adam with regard to the garden foresees the task of humanity with regard to the earth.

The word *shamar* refers as much to shepherds watching over their flock as it does to the farmer who tends a garden as in Gen. 1:28 and 2:15. "Humanity was made responsible" (Roop).

"The mission entrusted to us by God is not accomplished in the exploitation and destruction of flora and fauna," writes

ethics professor Jochem Douma. "On the contrary, the business of humans is not just about manipulating and deforming things according to their pleasure in order to enrich themselves, but about administering a function determined by God. It follows that humans must behave with other members of creation taking into account the characteristics attributed to each by God."

As administrators of great things, humans cannot presume to be owners. The world is God's creation and not that of human beings. Humans are the managers of a creation that remains the property of God. Creation must be managed according to the norms of divine justice and not according to human desire for power.

In our time, creation has been damaged on such a large scale that it cannot leave those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ indifferent, because the survival of humanity today and generations to come depends on us.

Anabaptists around the world call for prayer for their environment:

May God's Holy Spirit inspire and guide the church on the path of the gospel of Jesus Christ to watch over the needy, cloth the naked, feed the hungry and live out a gospel that restores and offers hope in the midst of darkness.

—Donadim Vasquez,
Guatemala

New Testament foundation

Several New Testament passages speak of the cosmic dimension of the gospel. We will limit ourselves to examining the texts in Paul’s epistles to the Colossians (1:15–23) and Romans (8:18–22).

Colossians 1:15–23 clearly affirms that in Christ, everything (*panta* in Greek) exists because “all things have been created through him and for him.” It describes the relationship that exists between the Christ of creation and the Christ of the cross. Christ is the one in whom all things are reconciled and rediscover harmony. Paul boldly declares that the beneficiaries of this rediscovered harmony are not just humans, but all things. This is an established principle for the present and the future.

In Romans 8:18–22, Paul writes that all of creation suffers (humans and other

creatures), and all await the redemption of the children of God. This suffering comes from human rebellion against the law of God. For God created a luxuriant and productive garden without weeds, a place of complete health and life, but sin brought sickness, death, thorns and thistles.

Humans must work hard to make a living because this nourishing earth is cursed. In the span of two centuries (since the beginning of the industrial age), the human species has called into question the basic foundations of life.

Creation is suffering and groaning in labour pains as a result of human activity: the destruction of natural spaces and urbanization, the extinction of species, the deterioration of the soil, the transformation of natural resources, waste and dangerous products, pollution on a grand scale,

the alteration of the planet’s equilibrium, human and cultural deterioration, global warming, the lack of sanitation in the large cities of developing countries, etc. These are serious illnesses that creation is suffering from.

The mandate that God entrusted to human beings is to till and keep the garden. However, in reality, human beings are only exploiting the earth without paying attention to the second part of the cultural mandate to care for the gift of God, knowing that the true owner of the cosmos is God who created all things for God’s glory. If God granted us the good deeds of creation to enjoy, we must take care not to threaten its potential.

If we act according to biblical teaching on this subject, we will live happily and offer a radiant future to coming generations.

The Netherlands

Extracting the gas in the north of the Netherlands (Groningen) has led to several earthquakes; development of more wind and solar energy sources can reduce reliance on gas.

Vast amounts of plastic debris in the ocean called plastic soup comes from discarded single use plastic objects, causing ugly plastic patches in the ocean and serious harm for sea animals.



Four acrylic paintings depict the Waddenzee in the northern part of the Netherlands; “one of the last empty and clean parts of the overcrowded country,” says artist AnnaMarjan Bosma, a member of Doopsgezind Gemeente Leeuwarden (Mennonite congregation in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands). “It’s near my home and a beautiful place to pray. I feel God is very near to us there.”

PHOTOS: AnnaMarjan Bosma



We must direct love toward the whole world. Above all, we much share Jesus to each child, convinced that they can make a great change in this world, even if we are passing through it.

PHOTO: Bryan Diaz, *Iglesia Cruising for Jesus* in Cali, Colombia.

The benefits of following biblical teaching on creation care

Biblical teaching on creation care has several benefits. It allows us to:

- Banish ignorance in the face of our responsibility when it comes to protecting creation. The more we are informed on the damage and destruction inflicted on our Lord's earth, the more we are obligated to revisit our responsibility as managers and administrators of our planet and its inhabitants. We understand that God is the creator of the entire universe (Genesis 1:1), which bears eloquent testimony to God (Psalm 19). All of creation belongs to God (Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26), who loves creation and takes care of it, giving water and nourishment to all creatures (Psalm 104; Acts 14:17), even as God gave Christ Jesus (John 3:16). We are assured that the Lord blesses and keeps us (Psalm 104; Numbers 6:24–26).
- Grant a sabbatical rest, i.e., time for re-establishment and the enjoyment of the fruits of God's creation (Exodus 20:23; Leviticus 25:26). Even as God provides for the needs of God's creatures, we must also do so by permitting the rest of creation to be productive and multiply (Genesis 1:22; 9:1–7; 28:17), and not add "house upon house" (Isaiah 5:8).
- Participate in efforts to stop the rapid deterioration of creation that threatens the world. The consequences of this deterioration are dramatic for the humans as well as other species.
- Work toward sustainable development without compromising the development of future generations.

Guatemala

Central America is often affected by tropical storms causing mudslides, droughts or flooding which can lead to destruction of homes and farms, malnutrition and contaminated drinking water. The Mennonite Church in Guatemala ministers among vulnerable people in remote rural areas and underserved urban areas. The most vulnerable populations of Guatemala City have been affected by critically low levels of drinking water, putting them at greater risk of disease and social unrest.



La Iglesia Menonita Fuente de Vida, Jacó, Costa Rica, offers free workshops where children and adults make handicrafts out of recycled materials. “Through these workshops, we try to raise awareness about caring for the environment as part of our stewardship,” says pastor Sandra Campos.

PHOTOS: Sandra Campos

The costs of creation care

On a planetary scale, world governments are divided on questions linked to the protection of the environment. Capitalist countries and the most industrialized countries of the world are the biggest polluters. They do not speak the same language on the question of global warming, which is a genuine threat to the future of the world. Last year (2017), the United States, one of the most industrialized countries of the world, pulled out of the Paris climate accords.

The most industrialized states must set aside their egos and change their vision of the world to make way for the hope of changing the face of the world. It is then that the financial means can be mobilized to stop the damage to creation and its global consequences. Each state must be conscious of the serious ecological problems that threaten the very existence of creation.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the environmental situation is dramatic. Indeed, since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, thousands of armed refugees have devastated the fauna and flora in the eastern part of the country. Successive wars in this region have contributed to the destruction of the environment. Virunga and Garamba national parks have become

hideouts for local and foreign armed groups that kill mountain gorillas, okapis, hippopotamuses, etc.

In cities like Kinshasa, the environmental situation is tragic: Kinshasa, once called ‘*Kin la belle*’ [Kinshasa the beautiful] is now described by the people of Kinshasa themselves as ‘*Kin la poubelle*’ [Kinshasa the trash can] (Nzuzi). Unsanitary conditions reign everywhere. Plastic bottles are thrown out in gutters, streams and rivers. Erosion has washed away parts of certain neighbourhoods in the city.

This lack of sanitation is at the root of deadly diseases such as typhoid, malaria, cholera, etc. Even as I write, a cholera epidemic is raging in one of the most populated and disadvantaged areas of Kinshasa named Camp Luka.

Faced with this situation, both the federal government and the provincial government of Kinshasa are powerless. According to the governor of the city, the provincial government lacks the financial and material means to ensure daily clean up. Efforts agreed to by the government and people of good will are a drop in the ocean.

Protecting creation demands significant financial resources and a change in people’s mentality.

Panama

The Indigenous Wounaan Mennonite Brethren church in Panama is in conflict with the government and other settlers over use of the traditional lands. The church desires to secure land title to their ancestral territory – and to expand their spiritual territory with the spread of the gospel message to related tribespeople in Colombia.



Near the village of Wamba, east of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a farm serves as a fundraiser for a new Mennonite Brethren church building for the village. Here, three crops – corn, cassava and peanuts – grow simultaneously in the same field, but are harvested a different times. Mennonite Brethren women from Kinshasa spend two weeks at a time working on the farm and fellowshiping with other believers in the village.

PHOTO: J. Nelson Kraybill.

The contribution of Mennonite churches to the protection of creation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The damage done to creation in the DRC is closely tied to the cultures and food and economic needs of the populations of each province. For example, in the regions of Kasai and the southwestern part of Kwango, small scale diamond mining has completely modified the flora as well as water systems and certain species of animals have disappeared altogether.

In such an environment, Mennonite leaders raise the awareness of their members and local populations toward a change in mentality; to see creation in the light of biblical teaching.

Thanks to the Evangelism and Community Health program, pastors and even church members have been sensitized to work for their own development,

but also for the protection of the environment and the struggle against unsanitary conditions. For example, we have asked all of the pastors in Kinshasa to clean up the immediate environment around their parishes, to install hygienic bathroom facilities and to plant trees in courtyards where space allows it. After visiting some of the different parishes, this work has already proven to be effective.

In addition, young Mennonites have joined with other young people to work against unsanitary conditions and erosion in Kinshasa. This work is being done with the means people have at their disposal: sacks, shovels, etc. Thanks to the efforts of our young people in past years, the Lonzo parishes in Camp Luka of Ngaliema district and the Mfila parish in the Delvaux neighbourhood of the same district were saved from erosion that threatened their very existence.

Philippines

Farmers in the Philippines believe there are more typhoons now than 10 years ago. After the last major typhoon that hit near Rise and Shine Mennonite Church, Maria Aurora, Aurora, Philippines, bridges and roads were destroyed, houses were covered in mud and crops were destroyed. Please pray for a quick recovery.



“This photo reminds me of Psalm 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God,” says Shena Yoder, a member of First Mennonite Church in Middlebury, Indiana, USA, who is originally from the Philippines. She likes to take pictures of plants in creation that aren’t traditionally considered attractive.

PHOTO: Shena Yoder

Conclusion

In the context of the DRC, Christian churches in general and Mennonite churches in particular bear a heavy responsibility with respect to the protection of creation. Christian leaders and the faithful in local churches need more teaching on the theme of creation care. They must also engage in concrete action that moves in the direction of protecting creation. Church leaders must play a prophetic role in calling out political leaders concerning the deterioration of the environment.

The context of our brothers and sisters of the North is different from that of the South. Nevertheless, the struggle against the deterioration of the environment is a shared one, because the consequences are not only local, but global. This is why the experience of those in the North can serve

those in the South who are the most exposed to the harmful effects of the damage to God’s creation.

Historically, Mennonites are attached to working the earth (tilling and keeping it) and our varied experiences can reinforce the bonds of fellowship and sharing. My dream is that an MWC Development and Creation Care Commission could make a permanent mark as a community of faith attached to the teachings of Christ.



Kucedila Ndunzi Muller is provincial representative of *Communauté des Eglises de Frères Mennonites au Congo* (CEFMC), the Mennonite Brethren church, in Kinshasa, teaches at the University Center of Missiology (Kinshasa), and is a doctoral candidate in holistic development.

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Perspectives

Our love for God and God's people compels us to care for the environment in these ways.

Germany

Churches together for climate justice

by Rebecca Froese

“Climate Justice Now!” “People Power!” “Keep it in the ground!” echoed through the corridors as I walked through the Blue Zone – the place where 197 member-states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) gathered in December 2015 to decide on the future of our climate. It was the first time that I attended these climate negotiations and it turned out to be a historic gathering at which the Paris Agreement (a worldwide agreement to protect the climate and the people living on this planet) was adopted.

It was also the first time that I came in contact with a large number of faith-based communities advocating for sustainable environments and climate resilience, standing alongside the most vulnerable communities and people. Admitted as official observers, the faith-based communities had the chance to not only do the hard advocacy groundwork of approaching negotiators on a one-on-one level, but were even given a slot to raise their voice to an audience of ministers and heads-of-states at the High-Level Dialogue.

Climate change is not “fake news,” but a hard reality around the globe, most intensely felt by our brothers and sisters in the Global South. Environmental destruction and climate change, intensified through lifestyle in the Global North, are key contributors to poverty. Continuous pressure on our shared resources deprives the poorest and the most vulnerable of sustainable and dignified livelihoods; and this is not seldom the reason for conflict.

The current climate crisis and climate injustices clearly show that a sustainable environment, human dignity and improved community resilience of the most vulnerable are closely related and mutually dependent.

As Mennonites and Christians in Germany, we therefore try to pursue a greater extent of sustainability in our actions so as to protect God's creation for future generations and the livelihood of millions of people today.

On the smallest scale, this starts with some of our congregations having solar panels on their roofs to reduce the fossil fuel energy consumption.

It continues with some of our members refusing to own a car, because it is just not necessary in urban regions.

Many of our congregations are engaged in neighbourhood activities to strengthen the local communities and to support the less privileged.

All of these initiatives stem from the commitment to care for the wonderful creation that has been entrusted to us.

However, we need more of these issues on our churches' agendas – 100 percent renewable energy, responsible consumption, theological education for sustainable development and local advocacy work. In addition, being active and involved in the ecumenical faith family can enlarge this local commitment and lift it to a global level. Through targeted advocacy work on the political scene and influencing policies and decision, we can care for God's people that are not literally our neighbours, but members of God's global family.

Coming back to the climate negotiations: As a worldwide ecumenical fellowship of churches, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has a prominent role among the faith-based communities at the climate negotiations. The AMG (our conference) and other Mennonite conferences who are members of the WCC joined the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” in 2013, which resonated with Anabaptist values. In the climate context, this has been translated into the

Our love for God and God's people compels us to raise our voices, to stand together with the vulnerable, to be politically active and to strive for a climate-just world.

“Pilgrimage of Climate Justice and Peace”: raising awareness that climate justice must not be forgotten and that the weakest and most vulnerable of our global community have to be given a voice.

“We need the wisdom of creation,” said Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, during the service for climate justice at the latest climate negotiations: “a wisdom that sees reality and understands and recognizes the time in which we live. A wisdom that [...] has the courage to act and to break new ground so that we can prepare for the future together.”

Our love for God and God's people compels us to raise our voices, to stand together with the vulnerable, to be politically active and to strive for a climate-just world. Therefore, we join our ecumenical forces and pray as we continue to walk on this pilgrimage: “God of Life, lead us to justice and peace.”



Rebecca Froese is a member of AMG – Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland, a Mennonite member church in Germany.

Philippines

At peace with the land

by **Twinkle A. Bautista**

Is there a way to make a living without killing the environment?

For a country that sees thousands of deaths every year due to exacerbated effects of super-typhoons, this is a major question. Lives have been claimed and billions worth of infrastructure have been damaged due to intense floods and landslides brought by forest denudation, river siltation, excessive garbage pile-up and indiscriminate extractive industries.

Right now, the forest cover in the Philippines loses 262,500 hectares every year. Agricultural practices in the Philippines are mostly mono-cropping, slashing trees in exchange for cash crops which are heavily reliant on inorganic fertilizers and pesticides. People know the destruction they are wreaking on the environment but “is there an alternative?”

This is an issue that Peacebuilders Community Inc. (PBCI) encounters in most communities it works with. An outgrowth of the work of Mennonite Church Witness workers Dann and Joji Pantoja, PBCI started in 2006 in Mindanao, the southern part of the Philippines, which faces decades-long armed conflict. Non-state armed groups are very active there fuelled by corruption, unequal wealth distribution, discrimination and historical injustices that started in the colonial conquest and continues until now.

As PBCI engages with the communities there, the people ask, “how can we talk about peace when our stomachs are hungry?” Thus the need to search for solutions to address the economic need of the people and at the same time taking care of the environment in accordance to the biblical definition of peace which is:

- Harmony with the Creator – spiritual transformation
- Harmony with the being – psychosocial transformation
- Harmony with others – socio-political transformation
- Harmony with the creation – economic-ecological transformation.

One of the solutions that came out was coffee production. PBCI noticed that Christians, Muslims and *lumads* (Indigenous



“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.... The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed” (Psalm 95:3,5).

PHOTO: Liesa Unger

peoples in Mindanao) offer coffee to their visitors. Coffee then became an icon of peace because these three groups that are usually at odds with each other has this in common. Thus, Coffee for Peace Inc. was conceptualized in 2008.

Furthermore, coffee thrives best in a balanced ecology since coffee absorbs flavour from its environment. Coffee then, encourages reforestation and environmentally-friendly farming practices.

Using fair trade principles to create a just, sustainable value chain, PBCI trains the farmers on peace and reconciliation, coffee production and processing, fair trade, and social entrepreneurship.

In the central part of the Philippines, the community of Immanuel Christian Assembly of God Church (ICACG) in Pres. Roxas, Capiz experienced the wrath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. As a result, their sources of income and houses were terribly damaged. They needed to rehabilitate their economy and at the same time build up their own capacities so that they can immediately help when another disaster strikes. They also needed to address the forest denudation of their hills which are mostly planted with corn.

In February 2017, ICACG invited PBCI to train them. As of December, they have

We can be in harmony with the creation just as the Creator had commanded us to do.

reforested the hills with 5,000 coffee trees which is expected to bear fruit in 2020. To help in their everyday needs, they inter-cropped various vegetables in their coffee farm without using inorganic fertilizers and pesticides. In the next five years, ICACG will reforest 25 more hectares with 25,000 coffee trees. They are being asked by four nearby *barangays* (villages) who have the same issues of poverty and intensive deforestation to teach them the principles of organic farming and the peace and reconciliation framework.

These communities are living testimonies that we do not have to kill our environment in order to live. We can be in harmony with the creation just as the Creator had commanded us to do.

Twinkle A. Bautista is a missionary for peace and reconciliation in Kalinga, the Philippines, where she works with the Anabaptist-rooted Peacebuilders Community Inc.

Colombia

Taking action for your neighbourhood

by Jose Antonio Vaca Bello

There is a saying that you don't know what you have until you lose it. I would add "or until you see the real and present danger that you could lose it."

Something similar happened to our natural resources. For a long time, we had accessible clean water, pure air to breathe and clean and beautiful surroundings. However, when our city began to grow, we started to see garbage lying around; air quality became poor; and we were told that the rivers and streams (where our increasingly scarce water comes from) were endangered by concessions the government granted to companies to mine gold at the headwaters.

We began to get worried.

Our responsibility for the environment

This led us to take looking after the natural environment seriously, and we joined forces with many people who have a deep love for nature, including those who don't necessarily consider themselves Christian. Concretely, we believed that it was our responsibility to involve our church in the struggle against the grave environmental consequences of gold exploitation in the Cajamarca region.

This was how we began to participate in multiple "Carnival Marches" in favour of life, water and land sovereignty for our region.

In addition to the ecological and social implications, it had political repercussions because it led to public deliberation processes in which people could decide whether they wanted mining operations in their communities that affected their natural environment or not. These public processes contradict the laws that argue that our government owns the ground below our feet and as such can decide what to do with it without prior consultation and consent. These large protests and the negativity expressed by the communities during the consultations have led to the suspension and withdrawal of the mining company from Cajamarca for now, and we hope for ever.

Environmental consciousness in the church

At the same time, we came to understand that our church communities did not know much about the environment and certainly



We participate in "carnival marches" in favour of life, water and land sovereignty for our region.

PHOTO: Jose Antonio Vaca Bello

did not have an environmental consciousness. For this reason, we started a Sunday school series about the environment for adolescents, youth and adults which we call Eco-theology. A number of us shared about the topic in order to understand the reasons why God our Father and Creator of everything that exists calls us to take care of creation.

The topic has garnered a lot of interest in our community and we have begun to see clear commitments and initiatives on the part of our members. Some of these appear futile at an individual level, but when seen together, add up to have an effect.

For example, we realized that we should recycle, so we set up an ecological station at church where we separate our garbage to facilitate recycling. Our members began to collect the plastic lids from beverage containers which we put together and donate to "lids for healing", an organization that uses the proceeds from recycling them to care for children with cancer.

Once we spoke about the negative impact of batteries and cell phone batteries, some members began to bring those to church too and now we need to get an adequate container to collect them and later take them to a depot that knows what to do with them.

Another woman from the church realized that we could project the order of service

A number of us shared about the topic in order to understand the reasons why God our Father and Creator of everything that exists calls us to take care of creation.

onto the wall rather than print it out and in this way save some trees.

As such, small acts like picking up garbage, walking, biking, not using disposable plates and other little things have become important to all of us.

Creation care was the focus of the teaching at our church for a whole year. We believe that now we are a community that expresses a high regard for and commitment to the environment.



Jose Antonio Vaca Bello is a member of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Ibagué in Tolima, Colombia.

A Spirited gathering: MWC's General Council meets in Kenya

"It is my wish that [during our gathering], we meet with God in the fullness of his Spirit, in the communion of his people, and the gift of unity in the midst of the theological and cultural diversity of our global church," says general secretary César García. The triennial Mennonite World Conference meetings of the General Council (delegates sent from each national member church) are 23–26 April 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya, preceded by meetings of MWC committees and networks. Additionally, delegates and local Mennonites will celebrate Renewal 2027 "The Holy Spirit Transforming Us" in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018.

The members of MWC's Executive Committee, Regional Representatives, Commissions (Faith & Life, Peace, Mission, Deacons), Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee, Global Anabaptist Service Network and Global Mission Fellowship, and steering committee of the emerging Global Anabaptist Peace Network will enjoy face-to-face meetings at this time.

Staff, commissions and networks will give reports on their work. The General Council decides upon the MWC program plan and strategic goals (live out anabaptist identity, interdependent relationships, reconciliation and hope) for 2018–2021, reviews the finances including the Fair Share contributions for 2018–2021. New members will be

appointed to the Executive Committee and Commissions, and the positions of president and vice president elect.

The Commissions will introduce three documents for General Council action: a guideline on responding to controversial issues, a statement of solidarity with Indigenous peoples, a teaching resource "Identity and Ecumenicity: A Theology of Interchurch Hospitality and Denominational Identity."

"I enjoy the General Council Meetings because of the way we allow divergent views," says Executive Committee Africa representative Thuma Hamukang'andu. Through the decision making process, "We build each other's faith."

As at the General Council meetings in 2015, delegates will also have opportunity to attend equipping workshops to resource church leaders on subjects like church growth, leading through conflict, spiritual leadership and strategic planning.

"This meeting is indispensable, not just because of the business decisions, but also because of the common learning experiences,...of the whole body," says Executive Committee Europe representative Rainer Burkart.

"The General Council is the visible global church in its most intense way."

—Mennonite World Conference release

An invitation to Renewal 2027: The Holy Spirit Transforming Us



Renewal 2027 is a 10-year series of events commemorating the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement.

"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes" (Psalm 133:1–2).

On behalf of the Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC), I welcome the entire Mennonite World Conference family to our country, Kenya, for the meetings of the MWC General Council and Networks, and to Kisumu on April 21 for the Renewal 2027 gathering. "Let us sing for joy to the Lord; Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise" (Psalm 95:1–2). Your visit to Kenya during this time is considered to us as a special favour from God.

KMC is a Protestant church, rooted purely in the Anabaptist faith. We have been one of the member churches of the Mennonite World Conference since our beginning more than half a century ago. The conference serves a population of some 11,000 converts from different ethnic groups in Kenya (Luos, Maasai, Kalenjin, Luhya, Saboat



Chief international events officer Liesa Unger and Kenyan event planner Ayub Omondi.

Photo courtesy Liesa Unger

among other tribes). The Kenya Mennonite Church is divided into seven dioceses led by bishops and by a national executive council chaired by the bishop moderator. The conference currently has 60 ordained ministers, with 40 pastors and 20 deacons.

We thank God and Mennonite World Conference for granting the KMC Conference the great opportunity to host this global event that will bring together people from all nations into our country. Renewal 2027 is purposed to be an opportunity to celebrate, critique and renew the theological tradition that has shaped the member churches of MWC, and engage in broader conversation with other Anabaptist related groups and the broader Christian church.

We say thank you for coming and God bless you!

—Bishop Philip E. Okeyo, Moderator, Kenya Mennonite Church

YABs Fellowship Week



Youth in Bogota, Colombia, celebrate YABs Fellowship Week.

Photo courtesy YABs Committee

It's a new year and our annual Young Anabaptists (YABs) Fellowship Week will be here before we know it!

This year we will celebrate our 3rd annual YABs Fellowship Week from June 17–24. The theme is "Called to be Free," centred on Galatians 5:13–15.

The YABs Committee is collecting testimonies, prayer requests and song suggestions from different countries. If you have something you would like them to include in the materials, please send them to yabs@mw-cmm.org.

We're looking forward to a time of virtual global fellowship and local physical fellowship as we gather to remember and celebrate our international family!

—Larissa Swartz (USA) on behalf of the YABs Committee

Give a gift to MWC

Your prayers and financial gifts are deeply appreciated. Your contributions are important. They will:

- Enable and expand communication strategies to nurture a worldwide family of faith,
- Strengthen our communion's identity and witness as Anabaptist Christians in our diverse contexts,
- Build up community through networks and gatherings so we can learn from and support each other.

Go to www.mw-cmm.org and click the "Get involved" tab for prayer requests and on the "Donate" table for multiple ways to give online. Or mail your gift to Mennonite World Conference at one of the following addresses:

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17808 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA
- Calle 28A No. 16–41 Piso 2, Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Meet your Peace Commission

The Peace Commission offers MWC member churches a wide array of support: enabling talk about the peace issues facing individual churches, countries and continents; providing a conversation forum in which churches can consider together peace-related questions and issues that they would otherwise face alone; strengthening the common peace identity through mutual reinforcement and discussion; and further enabling cooperative efforts on select peace initiatives.

Every year for Peace Sunday (the Sunday nearest to International Day of Peace, 21 September), the Peace Commission creates a worship resource of Scripture readings, prayer concerns, reflections from our global communion, and ideas of activities to help churches observe this day. This year's theme is "A renewed peace church welcomes the stranger."

New initiative:

Global Anabaptist Peace Network

"The 105 member churches that form MWC have produced much 'fruit,' such as peace related organizations and programs," says MWC Peace Commission secretary Andrew Suderman. "Finding ways to connect, encourage, and have these Anabaptist peace organizations be in solidarity with one another in our common work towards peace has given rise to the emergence of a Global Anabaptist Peace Network (GAPN)."

Two multi-year grants are providing seed money for this emerging network. The Kindred Charitable Fund from Kindred Credit Union, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, awarded \$7 500 in 2017, \$5 000 in 2018 and \$2 500 in 2019 [Canadian funds] for MWC's GAPN. The Anabaptist-rooted United Service Foundation also awarded a significant three-year disbursement to support the peace network's establishment.

These grants funded the network's first steps: appointing Andrés Pacheco-Lozano, a Colombian peaceworker currently studying in the Netherlands, as network coordinator in October 2017 and facilitating the first face-to-face meeting of the newly formed GAPN steering committee at the General Council meetings taking place in Kenya in April 2018.

The Peace Commission hopes to formally launch the network at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival in Amsterdam in 2019.

A 2016 proposal identified four potential tasks for the GAPN: sharing prayer and advocacy requests, sharing news/information/stories about peace work, developing a member directory, and creating space – electronic and physical – "where those who are part of the network," says Suderman, "can meet, connect, and build mutually transformative relationships."



Peace Commission: (l-r) Antonio González Fernández, Jeremiah Choi Wing Kau, Garcia Domingos, Robert J. Suderman, Joji Pantoja, Kenneth Hoke, Jenny Neme, Andrew Suderman.

PHOTO: Wilhelm Unger

Peace Commission resources

- **Peace Audit.** Conducted in 2011–2012. The summary reflects the responses of MWC member churches to the question *How are you doing in being a "Peace Church?"*
- **Guidelines for Determining MWC Response to Internal Conflicts of Member Churches.** When MWC becomes aware that a member church is in a situation of significant conflict, MWC may be called to contribute to a peace building and healing process, taking seriously the guidelines in this document.
- **Peace Poster.** Resources found at mwc-cmm.org/peaceresources

Forthcoming from the Peace Commission

Peace Commission is working on the following statements for consideration by the General Council.

- Statement of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples
- Statement regarding Conscientious Objection

The Peace Commission is also updating the policy regarding political advocacy. This is intended to outline situations when MWC or the Peace Commission may make a statement regarding a political situation without the invitation of a member church (which is the current policy).

Peace Commission members

- Joji Pantoja, chair (Philippines)
- Andrew Suderman, secretary (South Africa)
- Jeremiah Choi Wing Kau (China – Hong Kong)
- Garcia Domingos (Angola)
- Antonio González Fernández (Spain)
- Kenneth Hoke (USA)
- Jenny Neme (Colombia)
- Robert J. Suderman (Canada)

President's column

Love reaches beyond tribalism



Displaced persons, congregated at one of the five Mennonite distribution areas in Kikwit, sang and smiled as the MWC delegation arrived. Then these survivors – mostly women – started telling their painful stories of violence and suffering.

PHOTO: J. Nelson Kraybill

Tribal warfare and violent struggle to control natural resources have swept through the Kasai region in south-central Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Thousands of displaced persons have fled to the city of Kikwit. Few of the dozens of Mennonite congregations in the Kasai have escaped assault, and Mennonites are among thousands who have died.

Last December a delegation of four, organized by the Deacons Commission, visited Kikwit. At Nouvelle Jerusalem (New Jerusalem) Mennonite church, we heard story after story from survivors – often women who saw husbands and sons killed and homes burned.

How I yearned for the New Jerusalem to come in fullness, to see every tribe and nation gather around the throne of the Lamb! Diversity is part of God's creative glory.

But when tribes turn against each other, results can be devastating. My country, the United States, saw catastrophic tribal war between north and south in the 19th century. Today prejudice against immigrants creates fear and sometimes leads to violence, and often deportation. Elsewhere, wars festering on several continents have roots in tribal conflict.

The apostle Paul speaks of the "mystery" of God's love transcending tribalism to draw Jews and Gentiles into one body (Ephesians 3). The church, Paul says, is the primary vehicle God uses for this miracle of reconciliation.

In the DRC, where tribe often determines who you will help, Mennonites of Kikwit have a vision of helping anyone in need, regardless of tribe. They have opened their homes to hundreds of survivors. At five locations sponsored by local Mennonites, Mennonite Central Committee and other Anabaptist mission and development organizations, survivors come during the day for food and clothing.

Mennonites in DRC are practicing a radical peace centred on Jesus, and the global church has much to learn from their courage. Let's also look for ways to help.

—J. Nelson Kraybill, MWC president (2015–2021), lives in Indiana, USA.



MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

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

- English
- Spanish
- French

Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

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50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada



PHOTO: Life TV Indonesia

A Countercultural Lifestyle



“The plane! The plane!” This was how a TV program began that I used to watch as a child in Bogotá. It was about an island where all the desires of those that arrived there would be fulfilled. In English it was called *Fantasy Island*.

It is possible to live on Fantasy Island right now, hoping that all our material wants will be fulfilled. Many television commercials say: “Would you like to *have* this or that? Well then, the only thing you need to do is ...”. *Marketing* strategies, social media, the media and even churches sow desires in us dressed up as *needs* that did not exist before.

Our consumption patterns are important to God. Our lifestyle – as well as what we consume – always preaches a message. Jesus himself warns us about the risks that we run with material things. To possess them – or not to have them – can create such longing and anxiety that it can even displace God. How difficult it is to distinguish among true needs, wants and luxuries!

In our Anabaptist tradition, we believe that how we manage money and what we consume is profoundly spiritual. It is for this reason that the concept of “simplicity” developed very early on in our communities. “To live simply” means adopting a lifestyle that runs contrary to so much that our society teaches.

One person who has had a profound effect on me in this regard is a member of one of our churches in Canada. As the owner of a large and successful company, he decided to *limit* his director-level salary and donate the additional company profit to church-based projects. His life is a concrete example of rejecting the accumulation of material wealth and voluntarily opting to live simply!

Even so, I have also come across people in our churches and institutions that have misunderstood what “simplicity” is. Sometimes simple living is confused with *poverty*. However, not everyone who lacks financial resources lives simply and as such those who have less also need to *opt* to live simply. It is very different to live simply because you have *decided* to do so and to do so because there is no other option.

Living simply is also sometimes confused with a *lack of cleanliness and order*. Sometimes, wanting to *appear* to be living simply leads to personal neglect, dirtiness, untidiness and poor taste. Even so, the appearance of simplicity does not always imply the cheapest option. How wonderful it is to meet people and organizations that practice a simplicity that is aesthetically pleasing due to its order and cleanliness!

Simple living encompasses many things. It has to do with how we manage our time and our money. It shows us that *less* really can be *more*. The practice of simple living affects our priorities, the use of credit, the goal of saving, the way in which we manage our time at work and our time for rest. It invites us to be generous and re-evaluate the notion of “possession.” Simple living has to do with the environment, which in turn is related to sustainable development, fair trade, organic agriculture and recycling, among other things.

In this issue of the *Courier*, we have chosen to focus on this last aspect: creation care. Over the last couple of years, many of our churches have suffered due to natural disasters. Without a doubt, our consumerist desires end up negatively affecting whole societies in other parts of the world, including members of our own faith family that live in those places.

It is for this reason that we need to remember that individualism, egotism and consumerism are the opposite of simple living. All these “-isms” reinforce the idea that you are the most important person on the Earth, pushing you away from Jesus and his message of *compassion*. This message invites us to focus on others and to extend compassion to all of creation.

We do not need to legislate simple living and compassion. Jesus does not call us to make a universal list of what to wear, what to spend and what to consume. It is not the same to live simply in the rural areas as in the city; nor is it the same to live simply in the Majority World as in the Minority World. These are decisions that need to be context specific. It is the responsibility of each church to discern what it means to live simply in their context by depending on the Holy Spirit and dialoguing with other faith communities.

It is my prayer that this issue of *Courier* contributes toward ongoing growth with this goal in mind.

—César García, MWC general secretary, works out of the head office in Bogotá, Colombia.