

2004 Quarter 1

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Together we
have much
to give

page 2

General
Council
sends
message
to churches

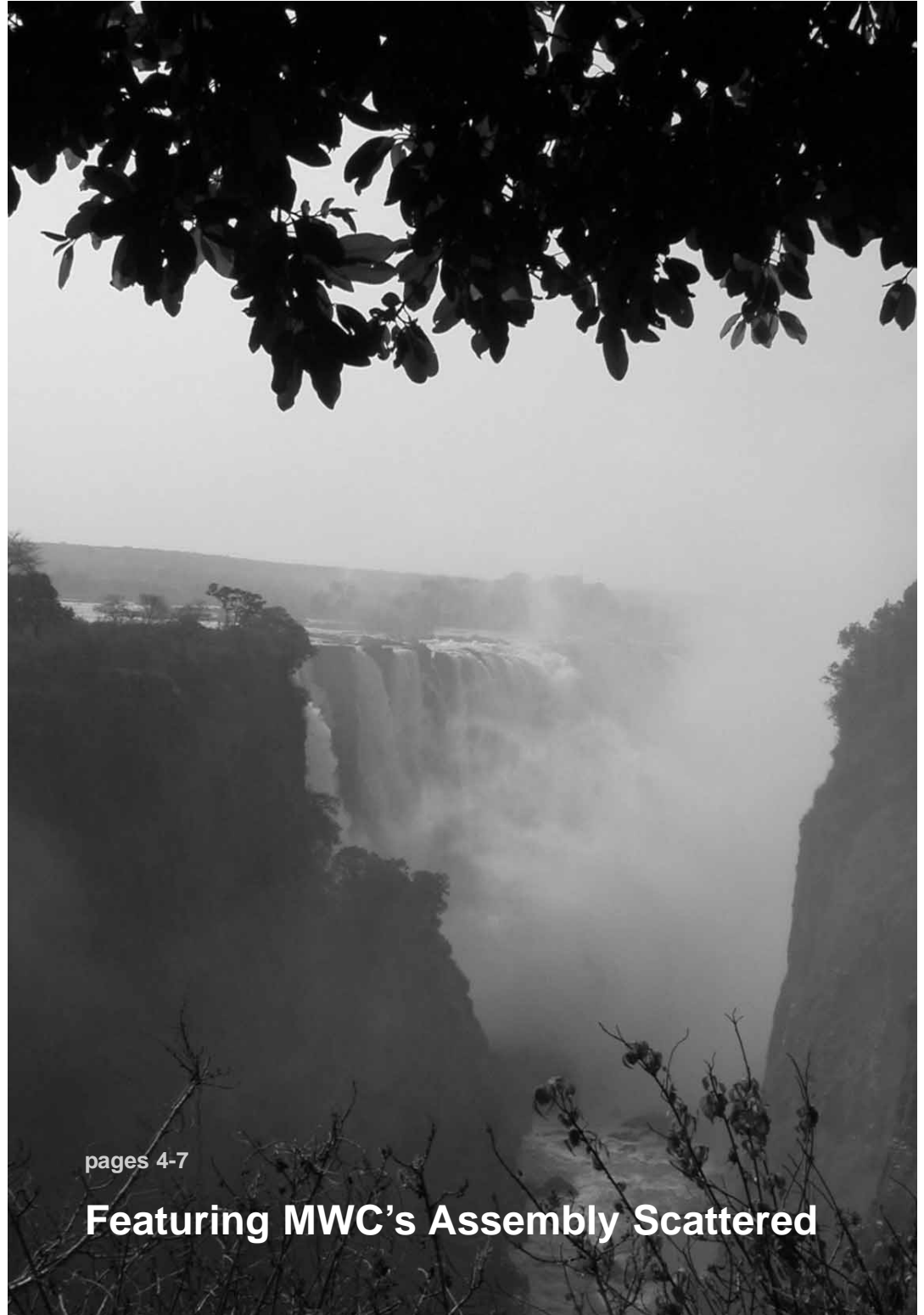
page 8

When the
HIV/AIDS
secret
comes out

page 10

Vietnamese
Mennonites
unite into
one church

page 13



pages 4-7

Featuring MWC's Assembly Scattered



Siaka Traoré (right) delivers a sermon during Africa Day at Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, last August. Translating his message from French into English is James Krabill, USA (left).

other within that family. Within the body there is an interdependence in which all parts are important. The body can only develop in a harmonious way when each part is acknowledged, honored, and respected. In the mission entrusted to us by our Lord, there are no stars or superstars. The beauty and strength of the body depends upon the contribution of each part, however insignificant.

In my culture, when friends or visitors come, we give them a live chicken in order to honor them. They accept the chicken and return it to us so that it can be prepared for their meal. An African proverb says that a visitor should not weigh the chicken that is given to him. Whatever the quality of the chicken, the guest should be grateful rather than critical.

“Can anything good come out of Africa?” Today that question comes because Africa has always been presented in a negative light. Is not Africa the poorest continent? Is not Africa the conti-

Together we have much to give

by Siaka Traoré

Sharing is an act that goes to the heart of who God is. Sharing establishes a relationship; it creates a communion. God, our God, is a God of relationship, of communion, of love, and of sharing.

Paul presents God as one in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). The triune God is a

God who maintains this communion and this relationship of love for all eternity. And he has implanted in each of us this aspect of his nature: communion, relationship, and sharing.

As Africans, we understand ourselves as part of a community; our existence as individuals grows out of the community. I exist thanks to others; my identity is determined and affirmed only in relationship to others. Because others exist, I exist.

This affirmation is drawn from the Bantu concept of *ubuntu*. Each one of us can be in the “we” or in the “I.” We do not say, “I am because you are.” If we say “you,” it creates a sense of distance, even exclusion. Our affirma-

tion is inclusive: you, people from all over the world, you are a part of us just as we are also a part of you.

When we say, “I am because we are,” we want to say emphatically that we, as African Mennonites, are a part of the large global family of Mennonites. Because the Scriptures are the foundation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, we can say with confidence that we are legitimate heirs of all Mennonite values. We do not need to have common or traditional Mennonite names such as Gerber or Yoder to be Mennonite; we are one because of our common foundation in Jesus Christ.

As a global Mennonite family, we complement each

This article is excerpted from the sermon Siaka Traoré preached on Africa Day, August 16, 2003, during MWC’s Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Cover: For many internationals who participated in Africa 2003, Assembly Scattered included at least a day at one of the seven wonders of the world—Victoria Falls on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Cover photo by J. Lorne Peachey

nent where there is the greatest number of wars and civil conflicts? Are not most of the world's HIV/AIDS cases in Africa? Is not Africa a place of perpetual need, with its hand always outstretched to others for help? Can we as a church expect to receive something from Africa?

In spite of our poverty, as Africans we say, "We want to give what we have." It is with humility that we say this, and with this humility we are determined to be participants in the common task to which we are all called. We too want to share the goodness that God has given us. We want our brothers and sisters from the North to accept our chicken—without weighing it, without criticizing it or looking down on it, without comparing it to their chickens.

What gifts do we have to give, we who are indebted to the West for bringing us the gospel message of peace and reconciliation?

1. *We have the gift of gratitude* to all those who gave their lives for the salvation of the people of Africa. In reading the history of mission work in Africa, we cannot be unmoved by the determination of the early missionaries who died in Africa—from diseases or from violent acts

committed by some of our people. God alone knows how many of them are buried on the African continent. They loved God, as they showed by giving their lives for us. There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends.

2. *We have the gift of commitment* to cross-cultural mission among those of our peoples who have not yet been reached by the gospel. This will complete the task already begun. Today many Western countries are also mission fields. We are ready and willing to go to these countries as missionaries as well.

3. *We have the gift of our cultural heritage*—songs, rhythms, dances—that can be used to the celebration and praise of God. For us as Africans, faith in God is a unified whole. We cannot separate our spiritual life, our relationship with God, from our professional, social, or emotional lives. God is there at the center of everything, and we want to share this dimension of our faith with our brothers and sisters.

4. *We have the gift of hospitality.* As Africans we believe in the sacredness of human beings. One way we show this is through hospitality, something that is highly valued in our cultures. To receive and welcome guests is

an honor for the hosts and a valued part of the African tradition.

5. *We have the gift of being a joyful people.* Even in suffering, we know how to rejoice. In difficulties and shortages, we have learned to hope—even to hope against all hope. This joy is often lacking among people who appear to have everything. We want to share our joy with others.

6. *We have the gift of natural resources.* As Africans, God has endowed us with the gift of natural resources, not for our own use, but for us to share with the rest of the human family. We have resources, others have technology, so let us sit and discuss together how all can benefit and not be exploited from these.

Together we have much to give. Too often we don't realize what we are capable of doing. We underestimate ourselves when we think that we can't really do very much.

God is concerned with the quality of our contribution, not the quantity. God's evaluation is not based on the size of the investment but rather upon faithfulness, whether with little or with much.

Note how the Scriptures put it:

*Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
Others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.*

*A generous person will be enriched,
And one who gives water will get water.*

—Proverbs 11:24, 25

God calls us to give what we have. We are to give our all, as God's instruments, so that the world may know God's peace.

Siaka Traoré is vice-president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso and coordinator of the Mennonite Central Committee peace program in West Africa.

Contributions welcome

Courier welcomes news, feature stories and ideas, and photographs about Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowships. Send manuscripts, ideas, and photographs to the regional editor listed below. Submissions may be by regular mail or via email.

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'Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy'

Editor's note: Africa 2003, Mennonite World Conference's global church gathering in August 2003, took place in two parts. Assembly Gathered, held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, August 11-17, was seven days of worship, singing, Bible studies, and fellowship (see C/C/C quarters 3 & 4 for a full report).

In this issue, we feature the second part of Africa 2003, Assembly Scattered, which took hundreds of participants to sites where MWC member churches are located throughout Africa. These tours were either before or after the Bulawayo gathering. Featured here are reports from various Assembly Scattered participants on some aspect of their experience.

Words aren't all you need when you want to say things

by Cheryl Hershberger

It was Tuesday morning, August 5, 2003, when my touring friends and I boarded the airplane taking us from Lalibela to Axum in Ethiopia. After receiving permission (a nod) from an Ethiopian woman, I took my seat beside her and began to introduce myself, only to discover that this woman, with whom I deeply yearned to communicate and share a bit of life, spoke absolutely no English.

In response, I found a sheet of paper and started writing. First, I wrote the alphabet. Then I wrote "sing," and I sang. I pointed to my watch, wrote the word and drew a picture. I pointed to the ring on her finger, drew a ring and wrote the word "ring." I continued pointing, drawing and writing words.

After many nods and hand motions, I understood that Gahira embroidered the design on her scarf, lived in Axum, and was inviting me

to have coffee at her house. Later a man who spoke both Tigrigna and English and who was sitting in front of us confirmed all. Through him I explained that I was with a group and would not be free to visit her in her home. So she said, "I will bring the coffee to the hotel." Although she thought rain might be a problem, we agreed upon 6:30 that evening.

When we arrived in Axum, I asked our translator to explain my last message: "God loves you and me." She smiled and we parted with the traditional three

Cheryl Hershberger (left) takes a piece of injera from Gahira. The two met on the plane from Lalibela to Axum, Ethiopia, and although neither could speak the other's language, they communicated well enough to prompt this visit by Gahira to Cheryl's hotel. Gahira's daughter (right) assists in the visit.

hugs. My heart was full of gratitude for this stranger, now friend, even though I wondered if I would ever see her again.

Around 6:25 that evening I heard a knock on the door and someone excitedly calling my name. It was Janeen, one of my touring companions, saying, "Cheryl, the woman from the airplane is here."

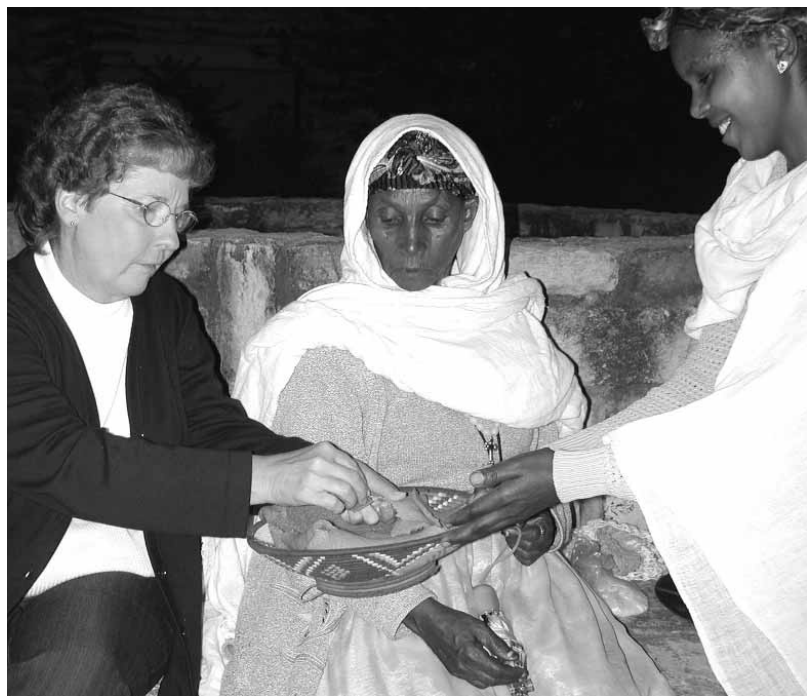
Janeen had been out for a walk, and as she climbed the long, steep road to the hotel, she had stopped to catch her breath. There she had found Gahira, sitting along the street, resting. She had walked a mile with her woven basket full of injera (the bread of Ethiopia) and a carafe of coffee. Soon Gahira with her daughter, her son, and an interpreter stood before me.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, I gathered small coffee cups from the hotel and sat down with Gahira on the bench in the patio area. As we ate injera and sipped the coffee, my touring companions began to appear. With

invitations, they gathered around us and shared in the late afternoon coffee ceremony. Together we celebrated our presence in this place, this place made holy by the warm and loving gesture of Gahira.

As Gahira was preparing to leave, suddenly, without warning, she handed me the basket that had previously held the injera. I was speechless for this precious gift had obviously hung on her kitchen wall and was worn by the work of her hands. With tears in my eyes, I responded with a hug and a quick request of the interpreter to explain that my tears came from joy and thankfulness. That basket had become a symbol of a grace-filled moment and will always remind me of my Ethiopian sister, the one with whom I had shared communion.

Cheryl Hershberger is a pastor at Hesston Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kansas, USA. Her encounter with Gahira happened during an Assembly Scattered visit to Ethiopia.



'The Lord is good' ... 'All the time'

by Paul Schrag

God gets a lot of applause at Mathare North Mennonite Church in Nairobi, Kenya. If the response isn't mighty enough, Pastor Caleb Owuonda urges the people to clap again.

Their meeting place resembles a farm shed, with tin walls and roof, a rough concrete floor, and no electricity. It's located in a poor part of the city—not the poorest, though—and its members fit that economic level too.

When Caleb shouts, "The Lord is good!" and the congregation of about 80 answers, "All the time!" it's clear that there's more to might than the usual ways people measure power.

On Sunday, August 2, 2003, the handclaps at Mathare North were more mighty than usual, thanks to a visit by 15 North Americans who were on an Assembly Scattered tour. By scattering to places like Mathare North, participants in Africa 2003 got to meet fellow church members in various places in Africa on their own turf.

Many people walked an hour or more to attend this church. Owning a car is far beyond their means.

The sound of drums and bells from nearby worship services mixed with the Mennonite congregation's singing and preaching in this neighborhood of Nairobi which has been designated for churches.

Bible study for an hour and a half was followed by a two-and-a-half-hour worship



Paul Schrag

Some dreams have been fulfilled, some have just begun. An MWC Assembly Scattered tour group pauses under a tree near Shirati, Tanzania, which was the site of the first Sunday worship services by missionaries Elam and Elizabeth Stauffer and John and Ruth Mosemann in 1934. From that beginning in what was then Tanganyika, the group learned, the Tanzania Mennonite Church has grown in 70 years to include 50,000 members in 286 congregations.

The Mennonites will bring Africa Christianity, education, and health care, Elam Stauffer told Chief Nyatega of the Luo tribe when seeking a place to start a mission. The group also toured one of the fulfillments of that promise—Shirati Hospital, where Esther Lehman Kawira is the medical officer in charge.

This hospital, with support from Eastern Mennonite Missions in the USA and the Tanzanian government, has a staff of 64. It operates a Medical

Research Center as well as a School of Nursing and Midwifery. Shirati Hospital has also pioneered in the integration of leprosy treatment in hospitals by closing its separate leper camp in the mid-1960s.

The hospital still operates a long-term care facility for people disabled by leprosy. Many of its 18 residents have lived there for decades.

The Assembly Scattered tour group also learned that in 2001 the Tanzania Mennonite Church and the Mara regional government signed an agreement to start a new university using Tanzania Mennonite facilities at several locations, including the Mennonite Theological College at Musoma. The campus for health sciences would be at Shirati Hospital, which would be upgraded for the first time in 30 years.

"We have started to dream," Esther said to the Assembly Scattered group. "It remains to be seen how quickly it can move."—Paul Schrag

service, and then a meal of rice, beans, meat, potatoes and crepes.

"One day, we will not have black, and we will not have white," Caleb said. "We

are going to be one. ... I am looking for that day."

After mid-afternoon farewells and picture-taking, as the visitors walked to their car, a little boy said: "Those

white people came to church here!"

Paul Schrag, Newton, Kansas, USA, is editor of the Mennonite Weekly Review.

I was a stranger and they took me in

by Daniel Hertzler

After 20 some hours on planes, with my body clock six hours off pace, I finally arrived in Harare, Zimbabwe, eager for rest and sleep. It was dark when I arrived at the home of Canaan and Listei Moyo, one of the host families for our Assembly Scattered tour group. But the meal was ready. For two days I had eaten airplane food. Now it was time for home cooking.

They had me sit down in the living room in front of a coffee table arrayed with food. My hostess came to wash my hands, the Zimbabwean way to welcome a guest before a meal. She apologized that she could not kneel before me because her knees were stiff. (We older people understand each other on a subject like this.)

The food was substantial and nourishing. I don't remember it all, but there was *sadza*, rice, and meat—both chicken and beef. There was also salad and dessert. I was well fed.

My host drew water for my bath, and then I went to bed. I slept soundly for several hours and then woke up—still adjusting my body clock. In the next three days our group would visit two BIC congregations as well as Great Zimbabwe and several other sites. We arrived in Bulawayo the evening before Assembly Gathered in time to register and get to our rooms for the night.

The Bulawayo assembly was meaningful. But when I think of Zimbabwe, I will always remember Canaan and Listei Moyo. They took me in and fed me when I was nearly 10,000 miles from home and when I surely needed their hospitality.



Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, USA, worked for 40 years as an editor and educator for the Mennonite Church in North America. Africa 2003 was the seventh MWC assembly that Dan has attended—and probably my last,” he says.



Conrad Mast

The Brethren in Christ congregation at Mutoko has worshiped in a grass-thatched shelter, but that may change as the result of participation in Assembly Scattered.

Mutoko BIC congregation finds new life as the result of Assembly Scattered visits

by Dothan Moyo

I have been pleasantly surprised by the way the churches in Harare and Mutoko responded to Assembly Scattered. To them, it was the highlight of Africa 2003. Hosting so many visitors for the first time was difficult for the small Brethren in Christ community in this part of the country, but by God's grace everything was easy when the visitors arrived, and everyone was blessed with the fellowship.

Mutoko BIC church was one of these congregations. Located about 160 kilometres northeast of Harare, this small church, worshipping under a grass-thatched shelter, hosted two groups of visitors. A congregation that was so ever dependent on the Harare churches for finances and leadership suddenly discovered its potential and took the initiative to plan both visits. Even members who had backslidden came back to church. Suddenly the church excelled in offerings and tithing. Suddenly a group that was seen in the eyes of the local community as a petty church became a

big church. This church was a member of a worldwide body of believers, the Anabaptists.

There's more. Some of the visitors to Mutoko have pledged financial support not only to put up a church building but also to cover the costs of electricity for the church and the parsonage.

Was Assembly Scattered a worthwhile venture? Certainly for the people of Mutoko it was.

Dothan Moyo, Harare, Zimbabwe, served as national coordinator for MWC's Africa 2003.

Africa now has more baptized Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, and related church members—451,959 in 2003—than any other continent.

Estimated global membership in 200 Mennonite, BIC, and related churches in 65 countries now totals 1,297,716.

'God has given me a wonderful life'

by J. Lorne Peachey

Many who went to Zimbabwe for Africa 2003 participated in MWC's Assembly Scattered. Time constraints, however, kept those of us who were gathering articles and photographs to report on the Bulawayo experience in this publication from participating in these tours.

Yet Sylvie Gudin, editor of *Courrier* [*Courier's* French edition], and I found ourselves the recipients of an Assembly Scattered experience in an unexpected way.

When we were in Bulawayo in 2002 for MWC's Executive Committee meeting, Sylvie went out for a walk and met a woman carrying a large bundle of wood on her head. Sylvie offered to help carry the wood, which the woman agreed to let her do.

Sylvie went to the woman's home—a one-room hut made of corrugated tin—and within that half-hour visit a friendship developed between Sylvie Gudin and Barbra Dube.

Later in the week I took the two-mile hike with Sylvie to record the new friendship with my camera. While there we told Barbra about MWC and that we planned to be back in Zimbabwe next year. "Oh, do come to see me," she said.

This year Sylvie went first, alone. When Barbra saw her, she ran down the path, threw her arms around Sylvie, and said, "God has answered my prayers. The French woman has returned."

Her next question was: "Where's the American?"



Above: Barbra's home is a one-room hut made of corrugated tin. She cooks her sadza in a second hut beside this one. Right: Barbra Dube—"God has given me a wonderful life," she says.

I returned with Sylvie a couple days later. We found that life has become increasingly difficult for Barbra. A water tank behind her hut had dried up, so now she has to walk a mile each way for water. She lost her job as a maid in the city, and she now makes brooms out of grass to sell.

To do so, she has to leave home at 5:00 a.m. and walk four hours one way to reach center Bulawayo. If she sells 12 brooms, she makes enough to buy a bag of mealie meal out of which to make *sadza*, her only food. When the brooms are gone, she walks the four hours back to her hut, arriving well after dark.

'How do I know which day to go to the city?" Barbra asked. "When I get up in the morning, I pray to God and ask if this is the day. Then, if I feel like taking the walk, I know that God wants me to go. If not, I stay at home."

Barbra told us she planned to move in order to get closer to water and perhaps find a new job. But she had delayed the move because she was waiting until Sylvie and I returned.

"Now that all this has happened to me, I know there is a God who cares



for me," she continued. "God brought you to me."

"God has given me a wonderful life," Barbra said as we left. "My neighbors now see me as an important person because people come from France and America to see me."

It may not have been an official Assembly Scattered tour, but I found new meaning to Jesus' words about faith the size of a mustard seed (Luke 17:5-6) from my visits with Barbra Dube somewhere near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

J. Lorne Peachey, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, USA, is managing editor of C/C/C.

Ode to Africa

Moonless—cloudless
pollution-free night sky
of the Matopo hills of
Zimbabwe

Soul-food for eternity
a memory that will not
be wiped away

Stars—stars and more stars
stretching from horizon to
horizon
designed by the master
planner
always there but invisible
in the pollution-choked skies
of other lands and places

Breathe deeply soul
and cling tightly
for your food will be
snatched from you

Torn by progress—sound
and fury—
wind and waves
that would drown you
Cling tightly to the night sky
of a nation reduced to the
absolute essentials—
food, air, water, and shelter
beneath a sky that has no end

—skcr

*Sharon Reimer (skcr),
Newton, Kansas, USA, is the
great-great-granddaughter of
Jesse and Elizabeth Engle,
first BIC missionaries to what
was then Southern Rhodesia
(now Zimbabwe) in 1898. Her
great-great-grandfather, Jesse,
died after only two years in the
country, leaving his wife and
two other women to carry on
the work. Sharon wrote this
poem on August 9, 2003,
while visiting Matopo Mission,
where the Engles first located
upon their arrival in this coun-
try and where great-great-
grandfather Jesse is buried.*

A message

From Mennonite World Conference Assembly 14

Greetings from more than 6,200 sisters and brothers gathered in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe!

The theme for our gathering, the 14th Assembly of MWC, was “Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy” based on Paul’s message to the Corinthians: “If one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part of the body is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Everyone in attendance was overwhelmed by the “grace of hospitality” demonstrated by the host Brethren in Christ Church. In numerous acts of service, members of the church—including many young people—shared their faith, music, prayers, food, houses, and technical and organizing skills with more than 1,600 international guests and thousands of Zimbabwean attendees. The ethos of gratitude and the enthusiastic singing of “God is so good” in a conspicuously painful situation moved us.

People from one of five continents planned two worship services each day. Mornings featured Bible studies and evenings sermons on the conference theme by representatives from the churches on that continent. During the worship service on Africa Day, foot-washing among Africans and African Americans (from North, Central, and South America) demonstrated that the

cross of Jesus Christ reunited in Bulawayo Africans who had been divided by colonial slavery. There were also stories, dramas, and much, much singing every day.

In these services we were made conscious of sharp contrasts in where we live. Some churches live amidst stunting poverty, pandemic diseases, disintegrating states, and eroding economies. Others live amidst distorted values, spiritual poverty, corrupting affluence, and rampant militarism. Numerous churches struggle with social violence amidst religious plurality.

We were honored to receive greetings from 13 Christian world communions and international Christian organizations. Together these 13 represented more than three-fourths of the world’s two billion Christians.

MW.C., in accord with the host BIC church, released a public statement on the situation in Zimbabwe, expressing strong support for the current efforts to initiate dialogue between the various political parties in order to bring about change and reconciliation.

While the Assembly was celebrative, the General Council—with representatives from more than 90 national conferences in 54 countries—made a number of significant decisions. It welcomed five new member churches and five new associate members. The Council affirmed for study and reflection a Faith and Life Council document of shared theological convictions based on statements from member churches. It heard the concerns of African women theologians for more involvement in church life. Representatives of the first Global Youth Summit reported on their interest in more inter-generational conversa-

During the final days of the 14th Assembly in Bulawayo, General Council members issued two statements on behalf of Mennonite World Conference. One responded to the situation in Zimbabwe (see C/C/C, quarter 3 & 4, 2003). The second, a message from Assembly 14 to MWC member churches around the world, is printed here.

to our churches

tion in their congregations and with MWC. The Council received, with enthusiasm, *Africa*, the first volume of the Global Mennonite and Brethren in Christ History series. There was an extensive report from the Global Gift Sharing project. The Peace Council produced an enlightening document on a continuum of peacemaking activities, biblical virtues that undergird peacemaking, and practices that form Christians as peacemakers. The Global Mission Fellowship, facilitated by MWC, was inaugurated at this Assembly.

General Council also accepted the report of an International Planning Commission, which recommended that MWC more deliberately understand itself as a “global Anabaptist-Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community of faith, growing in common identity and mutual accountability, with common core convictions and action.” One key element of this direction will be an emphasis on “sharing of gifts which create the oneness of the church.”

While it is difficult to communicate the thrill and joy of this Assembly, we were conscious this event did not belong to us alone. We were continually aware of those who prayed for months for the presence of God’s Spirit and for a tranquil situation. We are grateful to congregations who sent delegates to attend and contributed to the costs of this meeting. We thank God for the immeasurable blessings of Assembly 14.

We want you to be encouraged as we

MWC’s Assembly Gathered was crowds of people, up to 7,000 in total, who enjoyed days of worship, Bible study, singing, and fellowshiping together.

were when we walked among people who with conviction sang, “Be not afraid, I will be with you.” We invite you to join us in committing ourselves to support the Zimbabwe BIC Church in its continuing witness. We urge you to continue to pray for a peaceful solution to the conflicts within Zimbabwe.

Join us in thanking God for the inspiration of this occasion. Listen carefully to those who attended for insight into the reality of the church in Africa. Invite facilitators from the Global Gift Sharing project to your region to explore the meaning of “sharing gifts in suffering and in joy” in your situation.

The Bulawayo Assembly was a time-

ly recognition that more Brethren in Christ and Mennonites now live in Africa than on any other continent. The Assembly was an expression of unity, of solidarity between churches witnessing to God’s grace, peace, and justice in remarkably different cultural, political, and economic circumstances. The Assembly was a sign, an announcement that this new era of church life calls for a re-ordering of relationships. It was a foretaste of the eternal kingdom, when “nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Revelation 21:24).

—Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
17 August 2003



When the HIV/AIDS secret comes out

by Melissa Aberle-Grasse

When Ephraim Bainet Disi smiles, his eyes twinkle. One eye, though, is partly closed with scars because of a severe bout with shingles associated with HIV/AIDS. Ephraim, director of Brethren in Christ churches in Malawi, Africa, has lived with the HIV virus since 1995. His smile reveals scars but also a sturdy passion for his mission: sharing his story and leading the church in responding to AIDS in Malawi.

Ephraim knows this is an uphill journey: as in much of southern Africa, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Malawi is the number one cause of death for 15-49 year olds. An estimated 15% of adults are infected, and the rate continues to rise in urban areas. Ephraim's encounter with the disease began as it does for many Malawians.

"In 1996, I became recurrently sick," he says. "I knew I should go and have a blood test. I had nursed my wife through illness for several years until her death in 1995. Just before she died, she was diagnosed with AIDS."

Ephraim, a newly ordained pastor, tried to put her illness behind him and focus on his work. At first, no one questioned him. At that time, HIV blood tests were rare and conversations about the disease nonexistent.

"Later in 1996, my friend Gary Andricks, having watched me that year, finally confronted me," Ephraim tells. "He encouraged me to get a blood test. I learned confidentially that I was HIV-positive."

In 1997, Ephraim faced his next challenge with the disease, when he fell in love again and wanted to marry. Though he feared his fiancé's rejection,

with his encouragement they both had a blood test.

"Before we had a test, a counselor met with us," explains Ephraim. "Talking with a health professional helped us be objective and know the facts. But when the results came back, we were still surprised: my fiancée and I were both HIV positive."

The couple accepted the news and chose to marry in 1998. Then came the next family decision: his new wife longed to bear a child. They knew the probability of mother-to-child infection of HIV. Prevention drugs are available to only a very few Malawians because of cost and unavailability. They decided to go ahead. Their son, Eric, is now three years old, and so far has tested negative for HIV/AIDS.

In March 1999, Ephraim faced the first debilitating effects of AIDS on his immune system. For several weeks, he felt hot flashes and pain along his spine and head. Then one morning he woke up with shingles over half his body. With medicine, he recovered but

was left with scarring and blindness in one eye.

By the year 2000, while Ephraim had faced the personal and family issues of HIV/AIDS, only a few trusted peers knew he was infected. Then another turning point came. He was invited to a church leaders' retreat for those affected by or infected with HIV.

"At this retreat, I met with other church leaders who had shared publicly about their disease," Ephraim explains. "I began to see how God might use me if I were to share this secret."

In Malawi, no other clergy infected by HIV/AIDS had spoken publicly about their experience. When Ephraim began to speak out, the impact was evident right away.

In March 2003, Ephraim and a colleague organized a seminar for Brethren in Christ church leaders to talk about the conditions around them: young and middle-aged people dying, orphaned children, increased poverty. The second day, before the session began, Ephraim stood up.

"I stand before you as a pastor and church leader of fourteen years. I want to tell you, I am HIV positive."

The room fell silent. At first, people were shocked and didn't want to talk.

"There has been a mixed response toward his bold steps," explains Hendrix Dzama, Ephraim's colleague and confidant who helped him organize the seminar. "Some thought he was out of his mind in revealing this, due to the stigma still attached to AIDS. There are others who do not believe AIDS is real. It has not been easy for his family in the village or in town to accept this with a warm heart.

"To some, like me, we admired his courage, and he is a hope for healing in Malawi," Hendrix adds. "This picture has shown to us pastors that we are all



Ephraim Disi (right) shared his story in the HIV/AIDS workshop at MWC's Assembly Gathered in Zimbabwe.

equally vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.”

“A man in my church had been repeatedly sick recently, and I suspected HIV-infection,” Ephraim tells. “I had been praying for him, but I knew if I confronted him directly, it would be an insult. The week after I shared that I was HIV positive, this man came to me to talk. It broke the ice for him.”

Public health research in Africa shows that prominent role models like Ephraim are critical to stem the tide of AIDS. Where reserve about sexuality is great and medical resources are few, their voices provide courage or practical advice for HIV-infected adults about how to care for themselves and not spread the infection.

Ephraim and Hendrix have organized the church’s HIV/AIDS programs under the umbrella of Jericho Compassion Ministries. The programs focus on home care for the critically ill and orphan care. Both men teach about HIV/AIDS at a Bible college.

“We want the government to see the church leading the way in the response to AIDS. We need a human sexuality curriculum in our language to use in the church. We need to write the billboards about ‘safe sex!’” says Ephraim.

Like his frequent smile, Ephraim’s faith seems to defy the challenges. He is healthy right now, and last year he began taking the anti-retroviral drugs that may slow the spread of the virus. But Ephraim’s budget doesn’t cover the cost of the medication and food for his family. And he may not have long to live.

“Once in awhile, I feel worried about my wife and children’s wellbeing when I die,” admits Ephraim. “But when I pray, I find I am encouraged by a friend, or receive just what I need. Mostly, I just ask for more time. I want 5 or 10 more years, I tell God. I haven’t done enough to serve the church.”

Melissa Aberle-Grasse, a free-lance writer, lives with her family in Malawi.

2004 Quarter 1



Detail of a section of the Koinonia Quilt, begun during MWC’s Assembly Gathered and currently travelling the globe to raise awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

‘Koinonia quilt’ battles against HIV/AIDS in journey to churches around the globe

Strasbourg, France—A quilt is on a mission to do battle against HIV/AIDS. It has already travelled to North America and Europe with more stops to come.

During MWC’s Assembly Gathered last August, more than 400 women, men, and children hand-stitched fabric patches onto muslin squares. After the assembly, the patchwork travelled to California, USA, where women sewed the last dozen blocks and did the machine quilting.

In late October, the finished quilt was displayed at an AIDS workshop in Fresno, California, USA, which concluded with a dedication service.

The next day, the quilt was off to Germany for display in the Mennonite church in Berlin. Then it was on to the Mennonite church in Regensburg for an HIV/AIDS awareness exhibition and workshop. In December, the quilt went to France for display in Mennonite churches there.

Since then the quilt has returned to both Germany and North America with plans in the works for a visit to Africa, where it all began.

“This is exactly the kind of thing I wanted to have happen with this quilt,” says Pakisa Tshimika, MWC staff member who conceived the idea.

Months earlier, when he and a colleague were planning workshops on HIV/AIDS for Assembly Gathered, Pakisa wondered what kind of symbol would rally support for HIV/AIDS victims.

A quilt became the answer! Not just

any quilt, but “a global Anabaptist quilt,” Pakisa dreamed.

“A quilt, for me, brings out the best in all those who make it and observe and contemplate the finished product. It can help one reflect deeply as well as provide space to express one’s emotions,” he says.

Pakisa knew nothing about making a quilt, but he remembered a college classmate who did. He contacted Pauline Aguilar from Reedley, California, USA, who eagerly grabbed the global quilt idea and ran with it. She arrived in Bulawayo loaded with fabric. How big would this quilt be? She didn’t know, but she trusted many people would show up to sew the patches she was cutting.

They did. Some had never sewn before; many didn’t understand the concept of quilt making. But they stitched the tiny pieces together, often adding their name, the name of an AIDS victim, or a special message. By the time the Assembly was over, there were 258 finished squares.

“It’s a true celebration of unity in diversity,” says Pauline. “Each block is unique, but the variations of size and stitching don’t stop the flow of connection and unity.” Hence the name, “Koinonia Quilt.”

Pakisa hopes the travels of the quilt will be self-supporting, will connect churches and people involved with HIV/AIDS programs and will raise funds for the struggle against HIV/AIDS.—*Ferne Burkhardt*

Ethiopian church hosts conference on Spirit in Mission

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—Some 40 people from around the world joined with 150 Ethiopians for a Holy Spirit in Mission conference, held here July 31-August 3, immediately prior to MWC's Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

"We've gathered to pray for God's Spirit to be poured out on all Anabaptist churches," said moderator Nate Showalter, in the opening session of the Conference.

For three days participants enjoyed a feast of worship with Ethiopian choirs, sermons, stories on the work of the Holy Spirit around the world, and times of confession, repentance, fasting, and prayer.

The International Missions Association, a fellowship of eight international Anabaptist mission groups, was a key organizer of the event.

Three-way translations from German, Swahili, or Spanish into English and Amharic highlighted the international flavor of the meeting and demonstrated



A mass choir in colorful yellow, purple, blue, and red robes led the worship sessions. "By the last night we were all joining the choir's infectious swaying motions," reports one participant.

the oneness of vision and purpose of the group.

During the three days of meeting, a deep spirit of repentance fell upon the group. People wept and leaders confessed sins of pride and arrogance. An Ethiopian leader asked forgiveness of Mennonites for resenting their lack of openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. A German asked forgiveness for his people. "Pray for Europe," he pled.

Stories of church growth drew loud applause and

spontaneous exclamations of praise to God.

Javier Soler, a pastor and mission leader from the Amor Viviente church in Honduras, told how his group has planted 50 churches in Central and North America in the past 30 years.

Zablon Maduka, a director for missions and evangelism for Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania, told how this church has grown from 1,000 to 4,000 members as

they've reached out to the Sukuma tribe.

After hearing these stories, German evangelist Johannes Reimer invited non-western missionaries to come to Europe, where 500,000 are leaving the churches annually, and to the rest of the world.

"Why does the power of God leave us?" Reimer asked in his closing sermon. "What happened to the radical Anabaptists who covered Europe with churches?"

As Reimer closed the meeting scores flocked to the front of the church to pray and commit to world missions in the power of the Spirit.

Even though they were unusually busy hosting tour groups enroute to MWC, MKC leaders expressed deep appreciation for the conference.

"It was a refreshing call back to our roots," Girma Teklu said. "We feel a new closeness to other Mennonites and understand that you too believe in the power of the Spirit to change lives."

MKC is already offering to host a similar conference next year.—*Jewel Showalter*

New book paints portrait of global family

Published in cooperation with MWC, a new book offers a portrait of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ around the world through photographs, stories, and art. *In God's Image* is "a labour of love" by Ray Dirks, writer, photographer, and designer.

Dirks visited 17 countries on five continents where there are MWC-

related churches to gather material for the book. For two years, he visited ordinary people in cities and remote villages to capture their story with camera and pen.

"I always made a point of staying with my host families wherever I went," Ray says. "I wanted to get a glimpse of their lives, not their country's hotels and hostels."



Ray organized an exhibit at MWC's assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in August 2003 from material in this book.

The book is published by Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, USA.

Vietnamese Mennonites unite into one church

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam—Representatives of Mennonite churches from across Vietnam gathered in Ho Chi Minh City last July to form a united Mennonite church. It was the first time that the entire Mennonite fellowship was represented at a churchwide conference in this country.

The conference was organized primarily by two pastors, Nguyen Quang Trung and Nguyen Hong Quang.

Trung has been serving as leader of the Mennonite Church in Binh Thanh District of Ho Chi Minh City, a church established in the 1960s. The church properties of this group were confiscated after the 1975 revolution.

Quang, leading an independent house fellowship for many years, identified as a Mennonite Christian in

1998. Today he leads a church which meets primarily in District Two of Ho Chi Minh City.

Until now there has been no body uniting the several Mennonite congregational groups. Trung and Quang say the formation of a Mennonite Church structure will enable pastors to work together and facilitate further church development.

The united church plans to prepare a church constitution and seek to register the Mennonite Church with the



Above, right: Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, vice-president and general secretary of the new Vietnam Mennonite Church. Below: after agreeing to a united church on Sunday, Vietnamese Mennonites met in a park on Monday to talk about what it means to be Mennonite in their country. Each person received a shirt and a cap—the shirts with a dove and the words “Vietnam Mennonite” on the front and “Mennonite Church” on the back and the caps with the imprint “Mennonite”—all in English. At left with the bullhorn is Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung, president of the Vietnam Mennonite Church.



authorities. It will also petition the government for the return of church properties.

The Vietnam Mennonite Church plans to request formal membership in MWC.

Some 20 official delegates to this first conference came from churches in several

provinces as well as from Ho Chi Minh City. This was the first opportunity many of the leaders had to meet persons from other churches.

Trung was chosen president of the united church and Quang vice-president and general secretary.

Work for religious freedom in Vietnam jeopardizes life of Mennonite pastor

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam—Vietnam Mennonite Church leader Nguyen Hong Quang took the occasion of the 22nd South East Asian Games here in December 2003 to call again for freedom to share publicly the gospel in his country.

After several persons were detained by security police for distributing unauthorized literature during the games, Pastor Quang led church members to the police station demanding their release.

These people from several house churches were detained in Ho Chi Minh City for distributing fliers about the games that contained a personal witness by international soccer players about their faith in Jesus Christ.

After one person was earlier roughed up by police, a police major apologized and promised that it would not happen again. However, others were detained in following days.

In the first report of these events from Ho Chi Minh City to Vietnamese Mennonite pastors in North American, the message began, “Please pray.”

Pastor Quang is trained as a lawyer in addition to his pastoral work. He has served as legal counsel to a group of house churches and has numerous times been a

spokesman for churches when local authorities have torn down their meeting facilities.

As a result of his activities, security police frequently try to intimidate Pastor Quang. In the past few years, unknown persons on motorcycles have attempted to strike him on several occasions. Once he was severely hurt, and a rider on the motorcycle that struck him was killed.

In an incident apparently unrelated to that of literature distribution, a plain-clothed policeman on a large motorcycle on Tuesday evening, December 9, crashed into the small motorcycle being used by Pastor Quang shortly after he had met with an international human rights observer. His driver was apprehended and beaten, but Pastor Quang evaded police by running to the home of a friend.

Later that night Pastor Quang invited others from his church to go to the police station to demand the release of his driver, one of the evangelists of his church, who was released the next day. Persons detained for literature distribution were also released.

The motorcycle incident is viewed by the church and others as a veiled attempt on Pastor Quang’s life.



Left to right: Emmanuel Minj of Asia, Janet Plenert of North America, and Javier Soler of Latin America participate in a GMF planning committee discussion. Javier serves as chair.

BIC church in Zimbabwe to raise concerns about peace and justice

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe—The Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe has launched a Peace and Justice Committee in response to the church asking: “What is the BICC doing or saying about what is going on around us?” Bishop Danisa Ndlovu chairs the committee, which met for the first time in November 2003.

Concerns for the committee to address, said Ndlovu, include alleged police brutality, beatings, killings, lawlessness and political violence, all of which leave deep physical, spiritual, and psychological wounds.

In addition to Ndlovu, the committee includes BIC pastors Albert Ndlovu, Lobengula church, and Bruce Khumalo, Ekuphileni Bible Institute principal; and Erick Moyo, who brings legal expertise.

At its first meeting, the group considered goals and procedures along with the composition of the committee. They hope to add someone with journalism skills so that the committee can carry out its mandate more effectively.

The formation of a Peace and Justice Committee comes on the heels of a statement on Zimbabwe issued by the General Council at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly 14 held in Bulawayo in August 2003.

One Zimbabwe national newspaper published the statement and several other papers in Zimbabwe reported on its release. The statement was also distributed to the international Christian press and Mennonite and BICC publications worldwide.

GMF planning group outlines future of mission relationships

Strasbourg, France—A planning committee for a new Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) held its first meeting here December 11-13. The purpose of the gathering was to plan for future GMF meetings and relationships.

GMF was established in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in August 2003 when representatives from Mennonite World Conference and various Anabaptist mission agencies from around the world agreed to explore new ways of cooperating and relating.

GMF’s vision is to provide a forum where Anabaptist-related churches and mission groups can meet “for encouragement, vision-sharing, networking, and cooperating in mission.”

At its first meeting, the planning committee decided (1) to refine the criteria for membership; (2) to adopt terms of reference to guide its work; (3) to project expenses and income for the next three years; (4) to set contribution guidelines from GMF members; (5) to design a logo and motto; (6) to explore connections with other global and inter-

denominational mission networks; (7) to conduct a survey of goals and activities of Anabaptist-related cross-cultural mission churches and groups; and (8) to ratify Peter Rempel, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, as part-time staff for GMF.

The committee is also considering guidelines for consultation and cooperation in cross-cultural missions for Anabaptist-related churches and groups. It will facilitate exchanges for mission leaders from different regions and establish a web site.

The group agreed to explore Alma-Aty in Kazakhstan as the location for the next GMF gathering in 2006.

Javier Soler, representing Latin America, chairs the GMF planning committee. The vice-chairperson and representing Europe on the committee is Johannes Reimer.

Other planning committee members are: Fikru Zeleke (Africa), Emmanuel Minj (Asia), Janet Plenert (North America), and Eddy Sutjipto, representing MWC.—*from a report by Peter Rempel*

Peace worker released after kidnapping

Sincelejo, Colombia—Juan Castilla Urueta, kidnapped in northern Colombia on December 17, was released after 12 days of captivity.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) allowed Juan to return to his family after Colombian Mennonite Church leaders helped to negotiate a ransom.

Seven armed men came to a farm owned by the Commission for Restoration, Life, and Peace of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Colombia,

where Juan and a friend were working. They forced the two men into a van and left.

A week later, Juan’s family received a message that he was alive and unharmed. Later he and his co-worker were released.

Reasons for the kidnapping are unclear. Juan’s case is just one example of the ongoing suffering of the civilian population and the desperate need for peacebuilding, says Justapaz, the peace and justice arm of the Colombia Mennonite Church.

Apologies: In our coverage of MWC's Assembly Gathered (C/C/C, quarters 3 & 4, 2003), we inadvertently omitted reporting that Marianne Goldschmidt of France was co-presenter with Claude Baecher of the Bible Study on Europe Day, August 13. We apologize for this oversight.—*Editors*

Mennonite youth consider going against the stream

Groningen, the Netherlands—“Counter current is possibly the shortest summary of what biblical faith is about.” That is how Henk Leegte of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, started his introduction to the 18th Mennonite Youth Conference. The conference, for youth aged 16 to 30, youth workers and youth pastors, was held October 23 -26, 2003.

In addition to Henk, the conference heard Hansulrich Gerber, Geneva, Switzerland, and Gunnar Demuth, Berlin, Germany. Hansulrich told the group he had tried to go against the current, but now it seems he mainly goes with the stream. He finds it difficult to be counter current because so much more is accepted in society than ever before.

In discussions, participants concluded going counter to what is current is appropriate unless the aim is merely to distinguish oneself. Going against the current is also easier when you are in safe surroundings.

Some 125 young people and youth leaders from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, USA, and Canada attended the conference.—*Corine Duhoux-Bosch*

2004 Quarter 1

A call to prayer

Are any among you suffering? They should pray.
Are any cheerful? They should sing songs.

—James 5:13

- Pray for a good communication between the present and the future of the church. A significant number of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world youth gathered in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, last August. They have visions, gifts, requests, questions, and enthusiasm. Pray that the seeds of hope, faith, and commitment sown there be allowed to grow.
- Pray for women on every continent who have gifts that need to be discerned and encouraged by their churches. African and Latin American women met for the first time during the MWC Assembly 14 and found they have common experiences of joy and of suffering. At the end of the meeting they committed to support each other. Pray that this endeavor will continue.
- Pray for ASSUME (Association for Solidarity and Development of Special Women), a group of Mennonite women in Guatemala organized in 2002 to support victims of violence. Through workshops in different communities, they seek to stimulate self-esteem, to raise awareness of issues of gender, and to work towards dignity and visibility for women in Guatemala.
- Pray for the MWC Peace Council to press on toward the goal of helping member churches become strong and patient peacemakers. This is especially difficult for many churches today in light of the violence and wars going on around the world. The resulting destruction and suffering of the innocent can bring much disquiet. Pray for peace—and quiet.
- Pray for the peace efforts of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Honduras. Since 1985 this conference has been carrying on a meticulous and quiet effort to train and educate people in the ways of peace. The program has three courses of action: educating for peace in schools, training in non-violence among youth gangs, and providing tools for conflict resolution. Pray for Ondina Murillo, who directs the program.
- Pray for the new venture of the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) and its part-time staff person, Peter Rempel (see page 14). GMF will be an important way in which churches around the globe will be encouraged to join in mission efforts, both inside and outside their own contexts.
- Pray for the victims of HIV/AIDS and the people who work with them in many countries around the world. Pray also that researchers can find adequate treatment and that countries will be willing to share funds to cover costs of medicines. Pray that education for HIV/AIDS prevention may succeed in limiting the number of cases.

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Perspective:

Enhancing koinonia in the MWC family

by Danisa Ndlovu

The move of Mennonite World Conference toward being an expression of koinonia is a noble one. To make it happen, however, we need mutual sharing of resources and mutual accountability.

As a global community, we value fellowship. Members bound together by the love of Christ experience fellowship in its fullness. Such communities, according to Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6, lead lives worthy of their calling. They are “completely humble, gently ... patient bearing with one another in love.” They are mindful of the fact that “there is one body ... one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.” This spiritual union and fellowship make MWC a communion.

The leadership of MWC, in the context of such a community, strives to create an environment that makes its membership—more than one million believers in 53 countries—feel interconnected. This interconnectedness or koinonia calls for participation in each other’s joys and heartaches. When MWC member bodies give to one another the necessary and relevant support in times of need, there is koinonia.

MWC leadership should play a pivotal role in encouraging member bodies to share without apology what they perceive as their spiritual needs. MWC is rich in human resources: people with gifts, talents, and skills in evangelism and church planting, teaching, and discipleship who only need inspiration and motivation to rise to the challenge.

In our day, despite technological advancements, we seem overwhelmed by the poor, the needy, the widows, and the orphans. Our world is constantly bombarded by disasters. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has left communities devastated, particularly in central and southern Africa. As a global community of faith, we are to be sensitive to such heartbreaking situations around us.

The spirit of koinonia requires us to bear each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). In Zimbabwe, for example, the health delivery system is near collapse. Medical supplies are in short supply and, where available, are too expensive for the majori-

ty of our people. Health professionals are de-motivated, and some have left the country. The ripple effects of such situations coupled with insufficient food supplies can be devastating.

In situations such as these, MWC must make its presence known through member bodies who meet people’s social needs and concerns. In other words, such member bodies must not only lift up their banner but also that of MWC.

As MWC, we must make available space for our member bodies to compare notes with each other so that all can improve their ways of operating. Also, as individual groups serve on behalf of MWC, they are then worthy of every MWC member’s financial and material support.

Koinonia within the MWC family can also be enhanced by taking a stand against all forms of unrighteousness and injustice. Silence in the face of unrighteousness and injustice committed by institutions and organizations as well as by individuals makes us collaborators of evil deeds. We are “to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). If we indeed are a community / communion, there should always be room to rebuke and correct one another. There should be willingness to tell one another the truth with love and join together to condemn all forms of unrighteousness and injustice.

It is my hope that MWC will live up to the expectation of our grounding in koinonia. We will do this as we participate in meeting each other’s spiritual and social needs. We will also express koinonia by identifying with and being a voice for the oppressed.

Danisa Ndlovu, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, was elected vice-president of MWC by the General Council last August. He serves as bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe.



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