

Editorial

Jamie Pitts

I sat in the Singelkerk, my head spinning. I was in Amsterdam for an extended stay this past spring, enjoying a sabbatical leave from my regular teaching duties at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. I spent most days researching at the Vrije Universiteit, where I came to know Mennonite and other faculty and students from around the world. Intense daily conversations focused on the church's failures to respond justly to sexual violence, racism, colonialism, and economic injustice.

Before arriving in Amsterdam, I spent two months in Mexico City, hosted by a regional Mennonite conference. Similar discussions played out there against the backdrop of Mexico's ongoing violence, corruption, and inequality; of my own country's deep complicity in creating that situation; and of both countries' hostility to immigrants. What, we asked, does it mean for our churches to relate across international borders, when there is so much injustice and suffering?

The Singelkerk is the primary congregation of the Dutch Mennonites (Doopsgezinden) in Amsterdam. As I sat in its ancient chairs during a Sunday morning worship service, trying in vain to follow the Dutch-language sermon and prayers, the question came to me over and over again: What does it mean to be a global church? What does it mean to be Mennonite, given the reality of our church, of our historical sins and great global differences?


I am a theologian, and theologians are often attracted to theoretical solutions to these sorts of questions. We study scripture and the work of famous theologians and declare: This is what the church is and how it should be. Roman Catholic theologian Nicholas Healy called this approach to the church "blueprint ecclesiology," the confusion of our pristine theoretical models with the concrete, often messy reality of the church.¹

As I sat in the Singelkerk, I had a deeper appreciation for the fact that who we are as a global church, who we are as Mennonites, is bound up with the concrete, messy realities of our communities, and of our efforts

1 Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

to relate to one another in the midst of the difficulties. To be a Mennonite is not to possess the perfect blueprint for a global church, to have everything figured out in advance of the slow, difficult work of partnering together. To be a Mennonite is not to be sinless radicals who “get Jesus right” while other Christians struggle with compromise and failure.

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to repentance and forgiveness, to the shared adventure of discipleship and worship. In the Singelkerk, I gained a new awareness that, more than anything else, it is this shared life that makes us who we are, that makes us Mennonite across the world. The gift of God to us and through us is our fellowship.

The essays in this issue of *Vision* confirm, and considerably deepen, the insights I gained in my recent travels. I have organized these essays so that you, the reader, can trace three arcs of reflection from the local to the global, and back again. The first arc begins with

Brian Quan’s piece on Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto, where multigenerational worship services are conducted in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. From there we move to essays on a partnership between conferences in Mexico and the United States, by Fernando Pérez and Rebeca González; and on the work of Mennonite World Conference, by Alfred Neufeld. The next two pieces remain at a global level, with Margaret de Jong’s treatment of mission and Andrea Moya Urueña’s on possibilities and challenges for young adults who participate in that mission.

Rhoda Charles’s article on Habecker Mennonite Church, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, returns us to the local level, and begins our second arc. Charles describes how the congregation’s work with refugee resettlement developed to the point where three-fourths of the congregants are now native Karen speakers. As shared love of music is a central point of connection at Habecker, the next article reports on the ongoing work of the Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada hymnal committee. Katie Graber, Byron Pellecer, Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, and Saejin Lee illuminate the complexities of intercultural worship, a point

that is further developed by Pratik Bagh's discussion of worship in India and the United States. José-Luis Moraga, a Mennonite pastor in Winnipeg, Manitoba, who originally comes from Chile, investigates biblical and theological materials that help frame our understanding of these gifts of the global church.

The third and final arc begins with Werner de Jong's essay on Holyrood Mennonite Church, in Edmonton, Alberta, which also became multicultural as a result of the church's welcome of refugees. De Jong's opening vignette highlights some of the difficulties that can arise in intercultural worship, as well as some of the opportunities. These issues are explored at a more theoretical level by Jonathan Bonk, in a biblical-theological meditation on "slow" multicultural community, and by Hyung Jin Kim Sun, who advocates for a genuinely intercultural Mennonite theology. The reader can judge the extent of the differences between the two authors' understandings of "multicultural" and "intercultural" relationships. Finally, we touch down again with a reflection from Neil Amstutz and Bruno Gansa on the partnership between Waterford Mennonite church of Goshen, Indiana, and Benin Bible Institute.

Several of these authors, from various parts of the world, suggest that white North American Mennonites can gain from the global church greater openness to the Holy Spirit, expressed in more exuberant worship, daily dependence on God and the church community, and active mission. All the authors are convinced that participating in a global church gifts us, gifts us all, with community, and so with possibilities for mutual learning and a shared life in faith. The challenges to forming and sustaining global church relationships are great, and require us to face the legacies of colonialism and economic dependence, as well as our deep linguistic and cultural differences. But the reward is considerable: God's gift to us, each other.

About the editor

Jamie Pitts is associate professor of Anabaptist Studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, and editor of *Anabaptist Witness*.