

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

Gifts of a global church

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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 (Dooopsgezinden) 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

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The global church lived out in a local congregation

The Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto


Brian Quan

I've heard of borscht, but I can't say I've eaten it. And only recently did I come across the word *Zwieback*. If I were to ask the people in my congregation whether they could identify these two items common in the diet of Canadian Mennonites of Dutch-Prussian-Russian heritage, they would probably look perplexed. But if I were to ask them whether they know what congee, tong-sui, and xiaolongbao are, they would say yes. And

what's more, most of them would have eaten these foods in the past week.

The foods we eat are unique expressions of our culture. Also distinctive, but perhaps less readily discernible, are the ways faith is expressed among people of a particular culture.

I have been a part of the Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto since it was planted in the late 1970s. If you were to visit our church, you would be greeted with warm smiles. Your first impression might be that the congregation is homogeneous: everyone looks Chinese. But as our worship began, the fact of difference would become more apparent. You



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might even feel that you had just stepped into a United Nations assembly. The sermon, preached in English, would be translated into Cantonese by an interpreter, and the words would be projected in Mandarin on a screen. You would discover that our small community church is made up of people not just of three generations but also of three distinct cultural and language groups.

Being part of this faith community is a global experience, as members bring their distinctives to a church located in yet another cultural context, that of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In what follows, through several brief illustrations, we will explore some of the complexities and opportunities that are part of congregational life of the kind that we embody.

Challenges of language and patterns of thought

Toronto is the most linguistically diverse city in Canada and among the most diverse in the world. Approximately two hundred languages are spoken here. In a small way, our congregation participates in the diversity of this city. A common mission unites us, but moving forward together as people with three languages and three cultural heritages presents chal-

lenges—and opportunities for learning and growth and deepening faith.

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Because of differences in context, the meaning of the words we speak cannot be fully transmitted between our cultures. The same is true of the meaning of scriptural words. Take Jesus's inquiry in Matthew 7:9–11: "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?" We don't eat stones, but if given a choice be-

tween a fish and a snake, members of my church might well say, "I'll have both, please." Chinese people enjoy fish and seafood of every shape, size, and color, and we consider snakes quite a delicacy. For this reason, a Chinese believer may find puzzling Jesus's suggestion that even a not-so-good parent would never offer a child a snake for dinner. The words of the text can be translated easily enough, but their meaning remains elusive. And Jesus's point—"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts [fish, decidedly not snakes] to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"—may be lost in confusion around the folksy illustration he uses.

The larger context of this text in Matthew 7 is teaching about prayer. Jesus instructs his disciples to do three things: *ask*, *seek*, and *knock*. Almost instinctively, I notice how this passage lends itself to the structure of a standard three-point sermon. It offers three precise points and closes with this illustration about food parents offer to children. I also notice that the

three verbs are in the active voice. I sense the Spirit leading me to exhort my congregation to pray *courageously*, *assertively*, and *persistently*.

This is my default way of approaching the biblical text, and my inclination is to believe that my reading is logical, practical, and exegetically faithful. But I need to recognize that this approach is not universal; it reflects Western ways of thinking. It may well suit a congregation of Canadians whose mother tongue is English. I need to be mindful that those who come from countries other than Canada may experience scripture quite differently and may find my three-point distillation an alien approach to interpretation.

Complications associated with making a request

In this text, Jesus teaches us to come to God with our requests. The instruction to bring our petitions before God is rooted in the reminder that God's intentions toward us are those of a loving parent. Jesus invites us to trust in and depend on our loving and compassionate Father in heaven.

In Chinese culture, the act of asking is complex and involves much more than words. Before making a request, the petitioner must weigh many relational considerations.

But here again, interpreting this text for a Chinese-Canadian congregation is not a straightforward matter.

In Chinese culture, the act of asking is complex and involves much more than words. Before making a request, the petitioner must weigh many relational considerations. A proverb ascribed to a Chinese author is translated thus: "He who asks a question remains a fool for five minutes. He who does not ask remains a fool forever." For English speakers, the word *fool*

doesn't capture the extent of the injury the proverb points to. What is at stake is not merely embarrassment or shame or a sense of inadequacy. Here, being a fool means losing face. Losing face is a serious social problem in Chinese culture. It means loss of honor, loss of respect, loss of communal prestige. Losing face is to be avoided at all costs, because it disrupts harmony in relationships. It contravenes important standards of social etiquette.

A complex set of rules governs how face is lost and how face is given. For example, you could lose face if you made a request at an inopportune time or if you were overly assertive or if you approached the wrong individual with the request. On the other hand, face is saved or given when

you preface your request with a compliment or accompany it with a gift. Face can also be saved when you avoid a conflict or suppress a sensitive issue. The importance of face management is captured in this Chinese proverb: “Men can’t live without face; trees can’t live without bark.”

To use the terminology introduced by anthropologist Edward Hall, Western cultures tend to be “low context”; they rely on explicit verbal communication. Chinese culture, like Asian cultures generally, is “high context”; much is unstated, and the speaker relies on context to impart meaning. In a high context culture, the act of asking isn’t as simple as one would imagine, and a number of nonverbal factors enter into the process. For a Chinese-Canadian congregation, making sense of Jesus’s instructions to bring our requests to God needs to take account of these contextual considerations.

Complexities of conflict management

A reality in every congregation is conflict, but patterns for dealing with conflict are culture specific. In the dominant–low-context–society in Canada, egalitarian processes tend to prevail. Canadians generally get right to the root of a problem, in order to find a resolution while maximizing efficiency. With emphasis on achieving this goal, Canadians and people from the United States think and behave in a linear fashion. They are direct and at times confrontational. They show respect by seeking each person’s views or opinions before they make a decision. When a difficult decision needs to be made, it’s normal to take a vote.

Anthropological linguist Richard Lewis has studied the intricacies of communicating across cultures.¹ He would classify North Americans as linear-active. Linear-active people are task-oriented; they are highly organized planners, operating with a linear agenda. They prefer direct discussion, sticking to facts and figures drawn from reliable written sources. Speech is for exchanging information. They are truthful rather than diplomatic, relying on logic, not emotion.

In Eastern cultures, conflict is often internalized, unspoken, or overlooked. This response to conflict is one that attempts to save face. Lewis has categorized Eastern cultures as listening cultures, as reactive. People in reactive cultures rarely initiate action or discussion, preferring first to listen and establish the other’s position. Only then will they react and

1 Richard D. Lewis, *When Cultures Collide: Leading across Cultures* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2005).

formulate their own position. They rarely interrupt a speaker. And when the speaker is finished, they do not reply immediately. Giving face to the speaker and showing respect for what has been said require observing a decent period of silence after the speaking has stopped.

Underlying these behaviors is an intricate interplay of power and authority. In a high context culture, relationships are much more structured,

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and from the family outward, structures are hierarchical. In a traditional Chinese family, for example, the patriarch makes all decisions on behalf of the family, and his word is final. Typically, he rules the clan, and there is no challenge to his authority. Children who have grown up in such a family remember hearing phrases such as “Children have ears, not mouths.” Here, authority is positional; it is not earned but is simply recognized.

“High power distance” is the terminology cultural anthropologist Geert Hofstede coined for this pattern of relationship.² In high power distance cultures, higher and lower level people accept the authority structure as part of

life, part of the natural order of things, and lower level people almost without fail defer to higher level people, to elders and those of higher standing. In such a system, lower level people rarely question authority, typically accept decisions made by higher level people, and internalize their own personal opinions without expressing them. These observations help explain why dominant culture people in Canada sometimes perceive Chinese neighbors as quiet, reticent, and passive.


Of course, these cultural factors have profound effects on how pastors and parishioners deal with conflict in the congregation. Awareness

2 Geert Hofstede analysed a wide range of cultures and developed his cultural dimensions theory, articulated in *Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Science and Art of Comparing the World's Modern Societies and Their Cultures* ([Thousand Oaks, CA]: SAGE Publications, 2012). His power distance index (PDI) identifies the extent to which less powerful members expect and accept unequal power distribution. High power distance cultures usually have centralized, top-down control. Low power distance is associated with societies characterized by greater social equality and empowerment.

of power distance dynamics is crucial for understanding responses of people involved in a congregational conflict and for exploring possibilities for resolving it. If power distance is perceived as high, a parishioner may well internalize the conflict and avoid confrontation. Avoidance may not be the best way to move on, but it is an accepted way in a congregation characterized by high power distance. In any event, conflict resolution in an intercultural setting requires patience, understanding, and adaptive changes.

Confusions of identity

I've been part of the Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto for more the half of my life, but growing up in a Mennonite church has been confusing and mysterious for me. People I meet are curious when they find out that I am Chinese and Mennonite. They ask, "How did that happen?" Without too much effort, I could explain the Chinese part of it. I could give some



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context about my cultural roots and my upbringing. But where I got stuck was on the word *Mennonite*. I have had a hard time clearly articulating an Anabaptist identity. I doubt that I am alone in this. Many members of our church would likely have the same difficulty. What exactly does it mean to be Mennonite in an intercultural Chinese-Canadian congregation?

In our beliefs as Mennonites in Canada, we follow the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. Theologically, we articulate our convictions in Mennonite confessions of faith. We seek to live out our faith with authenticity and simplicity; community, peace, and nonviolence are important to us. The heroic tales of early Anabaptists inspire us and reinforce our faith. These early pioneers were champions of faith. Yet we have little in common with their experiences of persecution in sixteenth-century Europe.

The question remains, What does it mean for a church made up of Chinese Canadians to identify itself as Mennonite? It is impossible to be a follower of Jesus in isolation and in the absence of context. Historical, cultural, and biblical sources inevitably shape the faith of an individual

or group. The cultural context of our congregation offers us these hints: In Chinese culture, the idea of harmony resonates deeply. Since ancient times, the beauty of harmony has been at the core of Chinese philosophy. Harmony is not uniformity but “proper and balanced coordination between elements, and it encompasses rationale, propriety, and compatibility. Rationale refers to acting according to objective laws and truths. Propriety indicates suitability and appropriateness.”³

According to Confucius, harmony is the most important value for an individual, a family, and a society. “Confucian harmony presupposes the coexistence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them.”⁴ This philosophical outlook has affinities with the life and peace teachings of Jesus. A Chinese longing for harmony and human flourishing creates an opening for exploring the meaning of peace as we see it lived out fully in Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is fundamentally about harmony with God and others. The good news is that God has sent his Son to restore the shalom harmony that has been disrupted by sin. While some may see Confucian teachings about harmony as sufficient, in our view the shalom envisioned in scripture incorporates not just peace but universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—the way things ought to be.⁵

When viewed this way, Confucius’s ideal of harmonious human relationships reflects the shalom that Jesus came to restore. Maintaining goodwill in existing relationships and seeking reconciliation where it is needed move us toward a harmonious society and an inner harmony, all of which is part of human flourishing. If that’s the case, we can connect biblical shalom and the Chinese idea of human flourishing.⁶ In the midst of complexities around language, conflict, and identity in our intercultural congregation, convergences between Confucian philosophy and the peace we see and know in Jesus Christ enrich our faith and practice.

3 Zhang Lihua, “China’s Traditional Cultural Values,” Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, November 21, 2013; accessed July 3, 2018, <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2013/11/21/china-s-traditional-cultural-values-and-national-identity-pub-53613>.

4 Xiaohong WEI and Qingyuan LI, “The Confucian Value of Harmony and Its Influence on Chinese Social Interaction,” *Cross-Cultural Communication* 9, no. 1 (2013): 60–66, accessed July 3, 2018, <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020130901.12018/3618>.

5 Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not The Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

6 I’Ching Thomas, *Jesus: The Path to Human Flourishing: The Gospel for the Cultural Chinese* (Singapore: Graceworks, 2018).


About the author

Brian Quan is a native of Toronto, Ontario, and was born to parents who had immigrated to Canada from China. He serves as lead pastor of the three congregations meeting at the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. He also gives his time to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, serving as the assistant moderator. He is a husband, dad, friend, woodworker, hiker, and rock climber—a big sinner enjoying an even bigger grace, and an unlikely pastor.

Building a relationship of mutuality between two conferences

Fernando Pérez and Rebeca González

We are building an intercultural relationship between two conferences—one based in Mexico, and one in the United States—with different his-



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stories, cultures, languages, and ways of celebrating faith, life, and a vision of Jesus. By using the word *intercultural*, we mean to signal that our relationship is based on mutual respect and equality. We hope and expect to share what contributes to developing and growing into a visible sign of the kingdom of God on earth. We offer you our experience as one model of interculturality that breaks down barriers between insiders and outsiders and opens pathways through layers of privilege and under-privilege.

In this brief account of our development, we share our intercultural experience of shaping and being shaped throughout our ministry as pastors and teachers and members of the Conferencia de Iglesias Evangélicas Anabautistas Menonitas de México (the Conference of Evangelical Anabaptist Mennonite Churches in Mexico [CIEAMM]), which consists of congregations in and around Mexico City.

Separation and learnings

Beginning in 1958, the Mennonite church in Mexico City was begun and nurtured through the efforts of workers sent by mission boards in the United States and Canada. The agencies supported missionaries and also provided financial assistance. Unfortunately, this approach did not lead to the development of local leadership, nor did it foster strong, autonomous congregations. Instead, what developed among pastors and national leaders was a competitive spirit that frayed relationships and divided and isolated congregations.

For these reasons, those of us who were part of the leadership of the CIEAMM decided in 2001 to ask the mission agencies to end the financial support they had given for many years. This was not an easy step to take! Because of it, communities of faith faced an uncertain future. But even though the financial resources were important, we needed them far

In 2001 we asked the mission agencies to end their financial support. We needed these resources far less than we needed to build a culture of peace and strong, healthy bonds between congregations, regardless of leadership position or status.

less than we needed to build a culture of peace and strong, healthy, fraternal bonds between congregations, regardless of leadership position or status. We needed the money less than we needed to organize and deploy our own human resources. We needed to find ways to use our local limited resources to grow holistically and mature as communities of faith.

All this upheaval led to our pastors becoming bi-vocational. Our congregations did not have resources to pay full-time salaries. And we developed a model of pastoral teams in which two or three

people share responsibilities that earlier would have been carried out by a single pastor. Because of differences in the structure and make up of member congregations, each pastoral team has taken on its own characteristics.


Mutual support and accountability are always fundamental in a dialogue of trust, so we organized a process of resolving conflict around serious issues that always relied on mediation by an outside third-party.

Now we have new adult and youth pastors and leaders who did not live through the previous struggles of CIEAMM. These pastors have freedom to lead differently. They have studied Anabaptist history and theology, and they have a social conscience, an appreciation for community, and a sense of responsibility shared with all their brothers and sisters.

For thirteen years, we developed, experimented, and grew without any contact with the global church. Then in 2014, at an assembly of congregations, we agreed to send letters to several Mennonite conferences in the USA, with the hope of establishing new fraternal relationships. The only US conference that responded was Mountain States Mennonite Conference. As an assembly, we had decided to open our hearts to those who were willing to do the same with us. Having discarded the colonial practices of the past—economic dependency and autocracy—our desire was

to develop a new form of mutual support. As equals, we would rely on clear processes and firm steps for moving forward. History had taught us what we wanted in a new relationship.

It is on the basis of this conviction that interculturality is shaped: each culture is different, and no culture is superior or inferior to another. We are each open to understanding the other and to developing deep relationships with those who are different from us. Interculturality is an attitude of the heart. It involves being open to the life and practices of



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the other. It asks for transparency in the ways we worship and practice communion with God and each other. Interculturality welcomes the stranger in our midst. Just as the doors of our places of worship are open, so our hearts must be open. Opening our doors means that we receive, as a gift, the unknown one who speaks in a tongue we haven't heard before and have not understood. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, interculturality opens doors of love.

We sought opportunities to foster a new relationship between our conferences. We wanted to forge bonds with

brothers and sisters who are Anglo-Saxon, Latin American, and Indigenous, from all corners of the earth. Our two conferences each selected a representative to initiate the contact. Herm Weaver was chosen from Mountain States and Fernando Pérez from CIEAMM. They communicated via Skype, email, and phone. In Mexico in November 2014, the first face-to-face encounter took place. During that encounter, Herm Weaver and Jaime Lazaro drew up a document that clarified the conditions of equality and mutual support that would guide us in our encounters. We did not have a clear understanding of what we might do together, but we knew we wanted to develop a fraternal relationship of open dialogue between South and North and North and South. We wanted true communion with each other.

A relationship of mutual support in action

The bond of love grew into a relationship of trust. Soon after that first encounter, the two of us (Rebeca and Fernando) were invited to visit the

congregations and ministries of the Mountain States conference during 2015. In October of 2015, a group of brothers and sisters from several Mountain States congregations came to Mexico to visit the CIEAMM churches.

We (Rebeca and Fernando) had retired from our pastoral ministry after thirty years of service. We had also completed four years as moderators of CIEAMM. Our conference approved the plan for us to spend April–October 2016 as missionaries with the Mountain States conference. We were involved in three areas of their ministry.

At Casa de Paz (Peace House), a multiservice community ministry providing services to newcomers in Denver, Colorado, we were involved in strengthening ties between congregations and services to immigrants. We helped organize donations of food and clothing and developed a roster of volunteers to visit people in detention. Many church members, Mennonites and others, volunteer time and give generously to support this ministry.

In Englewood, we participated in the group known as Beloved Community. Here we helped pastor Vern Rempel with worship services and shared our experience with Casa de Paz and the people who arrived from a detention center run by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

We were able to visit almost all the Mennonite congregations in New Mexico and Colorado. During these visits we challenged the congregations to become more involved with immigrants and encouraged them to support Casa de Paz. We led Bible studies engaging believers with the text. We showed pictures of the work and emphasized the need for engagement with immigrants and refugees. Many people responded positively to our call for action, and we witnessed a new openness to helping refugees.


Thoughts on relationships between Mennonites in the USA and in Mexico

Out of our initial experience with Mennonite missionaries to Mexico City and our subsequent exchanges with Mountain States conference, we have identified three general approaches to relationship between Christians from the USA or Canada and those in Latin America.

First, there are those who are authoritarian in their teaching and who create economic dependency. They come with far more financial resources than nationals can muster, and with a kind of authority that exerts power over their converts. These dynamics continue long after the mission workers have returned to their homes in the North.

Second, there are those who adopt an incarnational model. They incarnate the gospel in the context where they serve. Their commitment to the people they serve and to God is palpable. They live in the communities where they serve, and they serve as equals, respecting the context and culture of the place. They are servant leaders.

Third, there are those who do not have an Anabaptist identity. Perhaps the early Mennonite missionaries to Mexico adopted certain ways of doing things because of their obligations to the mission agencies that sent them. They needed to justify the investment of financial resources allocated to this area of mission work. But their sense of accountability pro-



Some of our congregations and leaders still yearn for the good old days when resources were plentiful. Others live with the threat of poverty but at the same time seek to be honest and transparent, not fearing the effects of our present situation of uncertainty.


moted lengthy procedures that were exhausting for the missionaries and unjust for those on the receiving end of their efforts. For many Mennonite churches in Latin America, strenuous efforts are underway to recover an Anabaptist identity, because many missionaries did not know Anabaptist theology and didn't teach it, live it, or promote its life-giving practices.

Conclusion

The reality we live with as Mennonites in Latin America is complicated. Some of our congregations and leaders still yearn for the good old days when resources were plentiful. Others live with the threat of poverty but at the same time seek to be honest and transparent, not fearing the effects of our present situation of uncertainty.

We are trying to be incarnational in our approach. The old model of church, in which some had plenty while others struggled to survive, reflected the wider society's unjust disparities between the wealthy and the destitute. It was the fact of this inequality that drove us to the decision that we needed to learn to depend on God and not on the security of funds and resources sent to us from outside and benefitting a few while the majority received nothing. If we cut off the donations and offerings, we could start something new and search for fresh ways to go forward together.

Uncertainties surrounding how to proceed with unfinished programs and projects motivated us to organize and move into the future from our



The old model of church, in which some had plenty while others struggled to survive, reflected the wider society's unjust disparities between the wealthy and the destitute. It was the fact of this inequality that drove us to the decision that we needed to learn to depend on God.

own shared reality. Great effort on the part of many brothers and sisters of our conference has brought an end to interminable disputes and taught us a new kinship and fellowship. New attitudes emerge as we struggle together to meet needs and participate in a variety of ministries. We see with new eyes.

It hasn't been easy. We face new challenges and obstacles every day. But we know we need to face this reality and open ourselves to it in order to shape a culture of peace, to embody a new Anabaptist vision, to incarnate a new way of being as individual believers and as congregations. We do so in mutual intercultural partnership with our sisters

and brothers of the Mountain States Mennonite Conference, recognizing that they confront their own challenges and opportunities, and that we can support each other in our efforts.

About the authors

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Gifts of a global church

The Mennonite World Conference experience

Alfred Neufeld

Temporally and spatially, the church is a global reality. In theology we talk about the church's synchronic and diachronic dimensions. These terms point to the church's presence simultaneously (synchronically) in many places and to its existence throughout the ages (diachronically).

The writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews says that followers of Jesus are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). This global cloud provides the church with courage, strength, correction, wisdom, and fellowship.

From its beginnings in Moscow and Switzerland in 1925, Mennonite World Conference was conceived as a global community. Although a hundred years ago its cultural identity was predominantly Dutch, German, and Swiss, now this global family consists of more than a hundred regional associations from more than fifty culture groups.

The work of the MWC Faith and Life Commission in global perspective

The MWC Faith and Life Commission enables MWC member churches to give and receive counsel on Christian faith and practice and on Anabaptist-Mennonite witness. The commission develops teaching resources in order to bind these many churches together through common theological work.¹ So far, four teaching resources have been approved by the MWC General Council:

1. "A Heart With Four Chambers: A Theological Foundation for the Work of MWC's Four Commissions (Peace, Mission, Faith and Life, and Deacons)," by Alfred Neufeld Friesen
2. "The 'Anabaptist Tradition'—Reclaiming its Gifts, Heeding Its Weaknesses," by Hanspeter Jecker

1 Links to these resources are at <https://mwc-cmm.org/article/teaching-resources>.

3. “Koinonia—The Gift We Hold Together,” by Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld
4. “An Anabaptist Theology of Service,” by Arnold Snyder

But already the gathering and editing of the seven “Shared Convictions” was a successful global initiative of doing theology together and sharing gifts and insights from different cultures, languages, and continents. The little commentary *What We Believe Together: Exploring the “Shared Convictions” of Anabaptist Related Churches* was spontaneously translated into local languages in Vietnam, India, and Korea.²

At present, two global topics are subjects of Faith and Life Commission work: How do we as a global family deal with controversial issues such as homosexuality and polygamy? Should we change the name of MWC, dropping the word “Mennonite,” so that groups such as the Brethren in Christ who embrace Anabaptist identity could feel part of the family without needing to identify themselves as Mennonite?

A wonderful gift and source of enrichment have been interchurch dialogues between Mennonites and Baptists, Reformed, Pentecostals, Lutherans, and Catholics. They open a wider horizon for us, to see the reality of the one body of Christ made up of people of every nation, culture, and church tradition. These conversations challenge our beliefs and help us understand other ways of reading the Bible. They provide evidence of differences in situations facing churches in other places. And they provide opportunity for healing. Had it not been for the friendship Danisa Ndlovu (MWC president from 2009 to 2015) had with fellow Zimbabwean Ishmael Noko (General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation since 1995), it is unlikely that the Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation process culminating in the 2010 LWF assembly in Stuttgart would have happened.³

Benefits of being a global church

1. The global church provides us with koinonia. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews testifies, Jesus’s followers are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. These are the faithful who put their trust in God. According

2 Alfred Neufeld, *What We Believe Together: Exploring the “Shared Convictions” of Anabaptist Related Churches* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007).

3 “Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of ‘Anabaptists,’” in *Give Us Today Our Daily Bread*, Official Report, LWF Eleventh Assembly (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2010).

to Hebrews 11, they extend from Abel, son of Eve and Adam, right up to the present (Heb. 11:1–40). According to the author of Hebrews, the church of our day lives in fellowship—*koinonia*—with the church of yesterday.

Those of us in Anabaptist circles do not often invoke the ancient Christian idea of the communion of saints, the spiritual union of the members of the church, the living and the dead. But the idea of this communion captures an important dimension of Christian faith, reminding

In addition to the fellowship that exists between the church militant and the church triumphant, we experience koinonia in cross-cultural, transnational, and intercontinental senses.

us that we are not the first generation of “saints”: Many Christians of the past are surrounding us. They are our cheerleaders, encouraging us to run the race faithfully to the end that God has set before us.

In addition to the fellowship that exists between the church militant and the church triumphant, we experience koinonia in cross-cultural, transnational, and intercontinental senses. During the wonderful multicultural worship that happens in the MWC assemblies

that take place for a week every six years, it is easy to feel linked together globally. But after the assembly, after participants return to their respective continents, nations, daily life, this feeling of koinonia retreats.

The writer of the New Testament letter to the Ephesians shows us that the redeeming work of Christ (Eph. 2:8–10) is the sole basis for this kingdom koinonia. To make it happen day by day requires that Christ tear down walls of separation, kill enmity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, bring them close to each other, and create from all of them one reconciled body, thus proclaiming and establishing peace (Eph. 2:11–22).

2. The global church offers us the gift of critical outside perspectives. When African Christians were having a hard time finding their way from a traditional polygamous to a Christian monogamous marriage culture, Christians from North America and Europe were eager to assist them with council and instructions. And to a large extent, that engagement was appropriate. Today, European and North American Mennonite churches are struggling with cultural issues of sexual identity, but they

have a hard time accepting council and instruction from their sisters and brothers in Asia and Africa.

When Latin American Mennonite Christians were living under military regimes, a strong prophetic voice from the North was heard at

It is difficult for Christians in the United States to accept criticism about the meddling the Pentagon engages in all over the world, weapons deals that increase risks of violent conflict, and televangelists who spread a diluted and distorted gospel all over the world.

the MWC assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1972. And it was opportune. But it is far more difficult at this moment for Christians in the United States to accept criticism about (for example) the meddling the Pentagon engages in all over the world, weapons deals that strengthen the global war industry and increase risks of violent conflict, and televangelists who spread a diluted and distorted gospel and monopolize Christian media all over the world.

We need one another not only for fellowship and encouragement but also for correction and exhortation. Our cultures and traditions blind us to certain

realities and leave us unable to comprehend the full extent—the breadth and length and height and depth—of the kingdom of God, unable to grasp fully the implications of its righteousness. The perspectives of others expand our perceptions and increase our understanding.

3. *The global church frees us from ungodly nationalism.* The church has been called God’s new nation out of all nations. And that reality reminds us that the nationalism we should advocate is limited. A follower of Christ cannot wholeheartedly say either “America first” or “Zimbabwe first.” More radically still, the Christian peace witness relativizes all patriotism and nationalism. Wars are motivated by a desire to expand territory (conquest) or defend territory (stopping conquerors). So most of our national-geographic limits are quite bloody. And far too often, as in World War I and World War II, Christians fought against Christians, Mennonites fought against Mennonites. This is a betrayal of our citizenship in the reign of God. It is a betrayal of our identity: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NRSV).

And then there is the reality of Christian denominations, outside of the Mennonite world and within the Mennonite family. Denominations have often found their genesis in movements of renewal, but sometimes also they originate in splits and fights. The denominational landscape can inspire and give us an appreciation of Christians' complementarity, but all too often, even among Mennonite groups, it reflects and fosters distance, misunderstanding, self-righteousness, and superiority—"holier than thou" feelings. The killing of enmity that Christ accomplished on the cross has implications on an emotional level, when it comes to living out, in the Christian and Mennonite family, Christ's work of peace and reconciliation.

4. *The global church helps us understand the mission of God and the mission of the church.*

When you break with the Constantinian paradigm and with the corpus Christianum, as the medieval concept of a unity of church and state has been called, the whole world—at home and abroad—becomes a mission field.

times wondered why historian Harold S. Bender in his articulated recovery of the Anabaptist vision did not include missions as a core value of Anabaptism. In my view, the answer is simple: Bender—and sixteenth-century Anabaptists—did not differentiate between church and mission: The mission of God is the church, and the church exists to activate the mission of God globally. This may be one of the greatest insights of sixteenth-century Anabaptist theology. Long before we had a modern concept of missions, long before we had mission soci-

eties and mission agencies, long before the disciplines of missiology and history of missions were developed, Anabaptists saw the sending of the church into the world as an obvious thing. When you break with the Constantinian paradigm and with the corpus Christianum, as the medieval concept of a unity of church and state has been called, the whole world—at home and abroad—becomes a mission field.

The "missio Dei" is strongly linked to the global extension of the kingdom of God. "Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" might be the best synthesis of God's mission. The horizon of this mission is the whole of heaven and earth.

5. *The global church speaks truth to power.* I will never forget the Lausanne Movement 2004 Forum for World Evangelization that gathered

1500 Christian leaders in Pattaya, Thailand. George W. Bush and the US army had invaded Iraq in 2003 and were fighting to defeat Saddam Hussein. For many of us, it was frustrating to see the US government use language taken from the Crusades: the “coalition of the willing” were fighting the “forces of evil.” The old ghost of manifest destiny was once more alive and well.

Several friends of the Latin American Theological Fellowship (FTL) put up a petition inviting the Lausanne Forum and the gathered group of international leaders to sign it as a way of distancing themselves from this Christian crusade language. Most of our colleagues from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe signed willingly. But many of our North American friends, who were leading the event, were strangely silent. The next day we were asked to stop the initiative.

Because of his involvement in the initiative, Ecuadorian evangelical theologian and missiologist René Padilla received a kind of reprimand: he

If local churches all over the world built a common frontier, fighting the darkness, defeating the prince of this age, the kingdom of God would be more visible. And if their primary loyalty to this kingdom were evident, then the kingdom of God would gain credibility.

had been scheduled to become honorary president of the Lausanne Movement, and that nomination was dropped. This incident affecting my friend and mentor showed me again how difficult it is on a global level to speak truth to power. But it is necessary. It is imperative. And there are crucial moments in history where the global church must speak truth to power.

6. *The global church makes the kingdom of God visible.* Anabaptist theology rejects the idea of the church invisible. For Anabaptists, the local church is a tangible community of believers. But that is not the whole truth: There is just one body of Christ. All Christian traditions, all denominations, all local churches be-

long to that one body. And there is just one bride of the Lamb, and one heaven of blessed hope. And above all states, governments, and kingdoms of this earth, there is the one kingdom of God, coming, breaking into time and space!

If the local churches all over the world built a common frontier, expanding this kingdom, fighting the darkness, defeating the prince of this age, the kingdom of God would turn out to be more visible. And if the

primary loyalty of all local churches to this kingdom, over against their own nationalities and civil identities, were evident, then the kingdom of God would gain credibility.

7. *The global church enriches our theology.* In his brilliant little book *Making Sense of the Cross*, British theologian Alister McGrath writes about five different settings that illustrate five meanings of the cross: the courtroom—no condemnation; the prison—deliverance; the hospital—healing; the battlefield—victory; the family—identity and dignity.⁴ Different cultures have particular affinities for particular understandings of atonement and the message of redemption in Christ. For a forensic culture, like that of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, legal images and language for redemption predominate. For a shame culture, the language of victory, belonging, and dignity captures the core of the gospel. In postmodern global times, the idea of healing has great relevance. In animistic cultures, the Christus Victor theory and the language of Christian warfare (Eph. 6) are meaningful.

Which group holds the true belief about the cross? Who captures its biblical meaning? To some extent, each of these traditions contributes a biblical view. And many of these biblical images are complementary in nature. And that fact of the diversity of images within the Bible surrounding this central Christian symbol reminds us that the Christian message is accessible to all human cultures. The Aristotelian-Thomistic logic, so crucial for Western orthodoxy, is actually limited and limiting. In contrast, John's vision described in Revelation 5 is of a great crowd from every tribe and language and people and nation, singing praises to the Lamb. This vision becomes reality here and now, when we learn to do theology in global dialogue with respect and sensitivity.

About the author

Alfred Neufeld is a Latin American Mennonite theologian who chaired the Mennonite World Conference Faith and Life Commission from 2009 to 2018. He was founding dean of the School of Theology of the Protestant University of Paraguay (Decano de la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay) and at present serves as president (rector) of that university.

4 Alister McGrath, *Making Sense of the Cross* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

Gifts of the global church

Margaret De Jong

When I was twenty-three, I prayerfully considered an opportunity to serve in Haiti. I was interested in spending some time overseas using my nursing skills, but when asked to commit to a three-year assignment, that span of time sounded very long. Yet as I prayed about this opportunity, I clearly heard the Lord say, “You can stay or you can go. The choice is yours. But you will learn things there that you would never learn here.”

While much of the church in the United States and Canada has been struggling to reclaim a missional identity, the global church of which I have been a part has only ever seen itself as missional, and it excels in gifts essential for proclaiming the kingdom of God.

After receiving those words, I was ready to pack my bags and head off on a three-year learning adventure. Little did I know that I would spend eleven years in Haiti, and eleven more in Senegal. And little did I know how much of my learning would happen through the church in these places. I am so grateful for how the global church in these two

countries has contributed to my walk of faith and helped shape me into the person I am today. Not everyone has the opportunity for such rich experiences, and it is always with joy that I attempt to pass on to others some of what my sisters and brothers in Christ elsewhere have given to me.

If you are hoping for something you have never heard before, I warn you that what I share here is not profound. And yet it is indeed profound, in that the gifts I received abroad are vital for the body of Christ anywhere, anytime. While much of the church in the United States and Canada has been struggling to reclaim a missional identity, the global church of which I have been a part has only ever seen itself as missional, and it excels in gifts essential for proclaiming the kingdom of God. Three gifts in particular stand out to me from my many years of participating in Haitian and Senegalese churches: faith, vision, and hospitality, and it is on those gifts that I focus my observations here.

Faith in God's provision and God's transforming power

I could give countless examples of how I have grown while being gifted to walk with Christians in Haiti and Senegal and to see them live out their faith. Here I will relate only one story. In my seventh year in Haiti, I moved to a new area and became active in a congregation there. When I heard they were going to have a summer missions trip to another area of the country, to proclaim the good news of Jesus and pray for the sick, I signed up, too, to see how the Haitian church did missions. But even after spending several years in this country, I still was full of pride and thought I wouldn't have much to learn.

Was I ever wrong. As we traveled together in a crammed bus for several hours over exceedingly bumpy roads, I began to hear the stories of how others were able to be part of this trip. One woman had no means to pay her way. Even the day before, with no funding in hand, she was convinced that God wanted her on this trip and God would provide. She woke up the morning of the trip, opened her front door, and found the cash she needed on her doorstep! Another woman earned her income by selling her wares on a table at the local market. She knew she was giving up a week's worth of income to be a part of this mission, but she had heard from the Lord that she should come, and there she was.

I was so humbled and challenged as I saw the faith of these missionaries, who were trusting God to provide from day to day. My income may have been meagre by North American standards, but it was far more than that of these fellow missionaries. I didn't even have to use a week of paid vacation, because from my work context, I was participating in church life and learning more of the culture. But these Haitian missionaries, because of their faith in God's provision, were willing to sacrifice their time and money to join in God's work. And in spite of their very limited means, throughout the week, when they met others who needed food or clothing or medicines, they were quick to put their hands in their pockets or purses and pass on what little they had. I had no doubt that they regularly shared with others a much higher percentage of their income than I was inclined to give. Their faith in God's provision gave them freedom to be incredibly generous to help others in need.¹

¹ I also recognize that Haitian and African cultures operate very differently from Western cultures in sharing of resources. Within one's own network, one gives to another as a kind of savings system, but then the receiver is obligated to give in return when the giver falls into need. But in this case, the local missionaries were giving sacrificially to those they would probably never see again. For further reading about money issues, which

And that was just the beginning of learning from the faith of my Haitian brothers and sisters. When we got up every morning at 4 o'clock to spend two hours in prayer and worship, I was once again humbled

The transformed lives of these Haitian missionaries challenged me to ask to what extent I had surrendered to Jesus's ways rather than living in fear and enslavement to my culture's norms.

as I thought of my own prayer life and relationship with Jesus. What a gift to see the passionate faith of this group, many of whom had been liberated from fear and enslavement to the powers of voodoo, a strong element of Haitian culture. They sang and danced, recited psalms from memory, confessed their sins, and boldly pleaded with God to rescue others from the power of darkness so that they, too, might experience the light and life of Jesus. It was so evident

from these missionaries' prayers that they had been liberated by Jesus's saving power and desperately wanted others to know this freedom, too.

Their transformed lives challenged me to ask to what extent I had surrendered to Jesus's ways rather than living in fear and enslavement to my culture's norms. And throughout the week, as they gave bold testimony to what the Lord had done for them, they touched the lives of many in the community. Some broke free of fear to the spirits of voodoo to boldly follow Christ. Others were healed of physical ailments and torment by evil spirits. Through the Haitian church's faith and obedience to Jesus, I experienced God's kingdom breaking through in ways unfamiliar to me.

Vision for context-specific kingdom work

I also see the church in Haiti and Senegal as gifted with vision for ushering in the reign of God in their contexts. In one of my final years in Haiti, I was attending an urban church with more than a thousand members, including successful business people and healthcare professionals such as pharmacists, nurses, and doctors. The church had a vision for reaching a rural, underserved area of their country, and a couple times each year they assembled a medical and pastoral team to meet the health and spiritual needs of this region. As a nurse practitioner, I joined others in the make-

from my experience applies to Haitian and to Senegalese contexts, see David E. Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: Observations from Africa*, Publications in Ethnography 37 (Dallas: SIL International and International Museum of Cultures, 2001).

shift medical clinic that was set up, using supplies and medicines that church members had donated or received as gifts from their employers.

Annually, many people from churches in North America go to Haiti for the same purpose, bringing with them their own supplies, and often weighed down with gifts and cash to help those with limited resources, many times creating an unhealthy relationship of dependence with Haitians. All too familiar with seeing detrimental handouts in Haiti, I loved hearing the pastor proudly tell the outreach team after the first trip, “We did this all on our own! We did not receive any assistance from foreigners. We came up with our own supplies and our own transport. We, the Haitian church, are capable of doing mission work.” Sadly, it is often the Western church that does not make space for churches of the south to exercise their visionary and missional gifts.

And I am well acquainted with The Way of Righteousness center in St Louis, Senegal. This center is a shining light of God’s kingdom breaking in, and again is an example of the global church’s gift of vision. But in the Senegalese context, with very few Christian believers living in this predominantly Muslim country, partnership with the broader church is needed in order to realize the local church’s vision.

Malick and Feluine Fall, both first-generation Christians from a Muslim background, are the current visionary leaders of the center. The Falls are passionate about holistic ministry in Jesus’s name, in spite of hardships they have experienced over the years because of their choice to follow Jesus. The center was initially started by missionaries, but under the Falls’ direction, strategies have changed to meet various needs in the community. The center not only houses a small church but also provides health services and vocational training opportunities, summer youth and music camps, prison ministries, and radio broadcasts of Bible teachings geared to those from a Muslim context.²

Because of its high-quality ministries, the Way of Righteousness center has received accolades from local public officials, including invitations to expand their educational and health services to the community. But with the church still in its infancy in this country, it would not be possible to operate these ministries without assistance from the church beyond Senegal. While fixing their vision on ministering in ways that are appropriate for their particular context, the Way of Righteousness center has

2 For more on the Way of Righteousness center, see <https://www.facebook.com/yooununjub/>.

welcomed partnerships with similarly minded churches and ministries in North America, Europe, and elsewhere in Africa.

This small church in Senegal has great vision, and although limited in numbers of people and in resources, in collaboration with the global church, by God's grace and power, they are carrying out their vision. It

It would behoove those of us from Western cultures that emphasize speed, finances, and independence to partner with the global church in realizing its vision, rather than coming with our own solutions. As my Senegalese friends often told me, "If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together."

would behoove those of us from Western cultures that emphasize speed, finances, and independence to partner with the global church in realizing its vision, rather than coming with our own solutions. As my Senegalese friends often told me, "If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together." We need to walk with the global church to go far in kingdom work.

Showing hospitality to strangers

Finally, the global church is richly gifted in hospitality. Situated in places where community and hospitality are strong cultural values, Haitian and Senegalese churches embrace hospitality with ease. In these cultures, it is a high honor to be visited by one or many, and just about any other activity under way gets

dropped in order to give time and energy to receiving the visitors at one's door. Although our Western places of work typically do not permit us to show up late just because company came, we could certainly grow in opening our schedules and our homes to others in our churches and our communities.

My experience in the global church has always been that I am especially cared for as the foreigner in their midst. Christians in these places want to make sure that I am comfortable not only in their congregation but also in their community. When I am struggling to learn a new language, they do their best to make sure I understand what is really being communicated. They offer to help me learn how to get around. They show me where to get deals on clothing, where to find the best produce in the market, and how to ride public transportation. They invite me to church activities and into members' homes, to ensure that I feel included.

I am loved and honored in their midst. It is clear that the global church takes seriously the biblical command to show hospitality to strangers.³ I have learned much from their gift of hospitality, and I desire to follow their example in welcoming newcomers into my community and church.

I have been enriched by the global church in many more ways than I can recount here. The international body of Christ is increasingly on our doorstep, as Christian students, refugees, and immigrants seek a better future in Canada and the United States. I pray that we would be able to receive the rich gifts offered by our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world, that together we may proclaim and bear witness to the kingdom of God in our midst.

About the author

Margaret De Jong served in Haiti through Mennonite Central Committee and in Senegal through Mennonite Mission Network. One year after returning to North America, Margaret is newly married and grateful for a sabbatical season. She is currently living in Fort Kent, Maine, and is figuring out what's next as she completes her MDiv studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

3 Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2.


Gifts and challenges for young adults in the global church

Andrea Moya Urueña

The global character of the church has been central to my life experience, and it continues to be relevant, now that I am a young adult. With an awareness of the church's global character come important gifts and challenges for young adults. One of the most important gifts is a widespread and deeply felt desire to serve others in a context of support by a caring community. Our service enables young adults to be connected with the church around the world. This gift also comes with challenges—specifically, the challenge of not finding a role when we return to our home congregations. In what follows, I will explore this gift and the challenges that go with it.

Gifts of service in the global church

I was born in Colombia and moved to Ecuador at age eight, when my parents began to work with Mennonite Mission Network. Some of my most formative experiences during those ten years when I was a young



With an awareness of the church's global character come important gifts and challenges for young adults. One of the gifts is a desire to serve others in a context of support by a caring community.

girl and then an adolescent came from seeing the work done through Quito Mennonite Church. The church was a hub for serving the food, health, and housing needs of a rapidly growing Colombian refugee population. We were also involved in serving the needs of children and youth from marginalized neighborhoods through a peace education program, and serving the needs of members of the congregation through church relationships and pastoral care.

Those who were engaging in this type of work were mainly people from Ecuador and Colombia, and they also included some service workers from the United States.

Having such service work modeled for me for so many years influenced steps I took as a young adult. After completing my university edu-

cation in social work and sociology, I decided to do a year of intentional voluntary service work. Out of the many agencies geared to those who are fresh out of college, it was the Mennonite Voluntary Service program that drew me. I was attracted to a program that not only provided participants with a voluntary service experience that stressed making peace by doing justice but also added to this experience a church community of local support.

I was not alone in my search for an experience of this kind. In their desire to serve others and be part of a church community, five other young adults in my service unit in Chicago saw MVS as the best fit. In addition to me, our unit included people from the West, Midwest, and Northeast regions of the United States. The work we did on the south side of Chicago included mentoring middle school students; teaching English to first-generation immigrants; leading nutrition workshops for children, youth, and adults; and assisting a Latino alliance organization in social media advocacy.

Throughout the service experience, my unit was supported by a local church. As a young adult, I felt safe and supported by this church community in doing service work. Even though the environment was new to me and the others in the unit, community care and support made our work easier. People from the congregation invited us to meals and movie nights, to attend rallies for social justice, and to many more activities that demonstrated that a community was taking care of us and standing with us.

When I look at my social circles now, I see that this type of service experience isn't unique to me. Many other young adults I know from churches in Ecuador, Colombia, and the United States are also engaging in service in these countries or in countries much different from their own. In my immediate network of friends are people doing service work in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, and Rwanda through programs such as Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) and Serving and Learning Together (SALT) that are promoted and supported by the global Mennonite church. Their work bears witness that young adults are invested in social service and that we bring this gift to the global church.

Challenges of (re)integration into a local church

Now, after recognizing the gifts we bring to the church, it is also important to address the challenges of being a young adult in the global church. We are following the example of Christ in serving others through doing peace

with justice in a variety of contexts in the world, but what is our role in the church? What happens to us when we are not in a distinct service role through a program of the church? What happens with us when we come back to be part of a congregation? The answer to these questions, in my experience, is: not much.

The times when I have seen young adults in meaningful and active roles in the church—roles from the core, not the periphery—are few. This is especially true of those who are unmarried and without children. Sure, we are invited to community meals, to attend worship, or (if it exists) to join a Sunday school class or activity for young adults, but that is the extent of our role in the church. I am confident that we have more than our peripheral participation to offer the church.

How can the global church invest in its young adults?

How can the global church invest in providing ways for young adults to have roles in leadership, in discernment processes, and in decision-making circles that continuously shape the life of the church? I hope this question is taken seriously and that local congregations can find the approaches that work best in their contexts.

In the churches that I have belonged to, mentorship and guided co-leadership could work well. For example, people who have been in church leadership roles could mentor young adults and invite them to co-lead in the spaces where they embody those roles. Young adults could also be invited to participate in a variety of processes of discernment and decision-making, so we can learn to exercise muscles of community learning and contribute with and from our perspective.

How can the global church invest in providing ways for young adults to have roles in leadership, in discernment processes, and in decision-making circles that continuously shape the life of the church?

I recognize that a challenge in the contexts I have known is that there are not too many young adults participating in congregational life, which makes it

difficult to get those who remain involved in the life of the church. But there are young adults who are invested in the church, and the church needs to be invested in them. Maybe the added voice and input of young adults from the core will draw other young adults to the church. Or maybe not, but that is no reason not to include young adults' perspectives.

Many young adults are engaging in service work. They are being sent to and received in church communities around the world. We are clearly still a part of the body, and this fact needs to be reflected in representation in core leadership, discernment, and decision-making circles of our churches. In this way, the gifts that young adults bring can shape the life of the global church from within and provide new perspectives for addressing the challenges facing the church.

About the author


Andrea Moya Urueña graduated with an MA in conflict transformation through the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding of Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA). She is currently living in Cali, Colombia, working with an organization that connects churches and faith-based organizations to promote active peacebuilding efforts in the region.

To God be the glory

A surprising answer to our prayers

Rhoda Charles

As we gather for Sunday morning worship service, enthusiastic voices blend to sing “To God be the Glory!” simultaneously in two languages. Habecker Mennonite Church has become an intercultural congregation made up of people about three-fourths of whom are native Karen (kah-



Habecker Mennonite Church has become a congregation made up of people about three-fourths of whom are native Karen speakers and one-fourth who are native English speakers. Each week we gather to worship our one God in two languages. How did this blending happen, when in 2008 neither group knew anything of the other?

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How did this blending of two groups happen, when in 2008 neither group knew anything of the other?

Our two histories

Habecker Mennonite is a congregation in rural Manor Township, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The first meetinghouse was built on a plot of land purchased from William Penn’s sons in 1724. The current building was constructed in 1898. For many years, the large Mennonite families who lived on neighboring farms filled it on Sunday mornings. But in the last fifty years, attendance declined as many of the congregation’s grown children moved away and the church experienced some divisions. In

2005 there remained about fifty aging adults who felt discouraged. We wondered: How can we survive? Should we simply close our doors and disperse to join other congregations?

At the same time, there was strong loyalty among the long-term members. An older woman reminded us, “We still have love to give!” As she

walked through empty Sunday school classrooms, she passionately prayed that they would again be filled with children.

Meanwhile, halfway around the world, people of a persecuted minority group in Burma/Myanmar were fleeing as their villages were burned and the men were shot or forced to carry supplies for the soldiers. Mothers grabbed a little rice and a few clothes as they ran with their children, hiding as they fled through the jungle. After months and sometimes years in the jungle, these displaced Karen people came to refugee camps in Thailand, across the border from Burma. After the United Nations determined that it was not safe for the Karen to return to their homeland, efforts began to resettle them under refugee status. While some were Buddhist, many others gathered at churches in the refugee camps to pray that God would send them to a place of welcome where they could continue their Christian worship.

The new story begins

By God's mercy, in June 2008 a surprising story began to unfold, connecting these two histories into one intercultural church. We call it God's amazing story. In 2007 Karen Sensenig had been invited to serve as pastor of Habecker Mennonite. Karen brought with her years of experience as a schoolteacher as well as intercultural understanding from living and working in Swaziland and Sudan along with her husband and their children. Under Karen's leadership, the congregation joined six other churches in a program called Partner for Missional Churches. This three-year cohort venture helped prepare the congregation for God's next work, something that was not on anyone's ten-year strategic plan.

In May 2008, Pastor Karen presented an opportunity that came to us through Church World Service (CWS) to sponsor a Karen family of six who were scheduled to arrive in two weeks. Our congregation was open and learned what we could about the Karen people, but in the end we felt that it would be a stretch for us to support a family of six.

Several weeks later, CWS called back about a family of four who would be arriving the next day from a refugee camp in Thailand. We were told they simply needed a place to lay their heads until an apartment was ready and a church sponsor found. Arthur and Miriam Charles, a couple in their eighties, graciously opened their home and hearts to the parents and two preschool children, none of whom knew one word of English and who arrived with jetlag after traveling for twenty-four hours.

On Sunday morning, Arthur and Miriam brought the family along to church, where the only language everyone could share was smiles and love. This connection helped our tiny congregation say yes to sponsoring our first Karen family.

Resettlement stage

The years 2008-11 were primarily years of resettlement assistance. While the learning curve was steep, our little congregation was not new to resettling refugees. In the 1950s, members had sponsored families fleeing Eastern Europe after World War II. We sponsored an extended family of Vietnamese immigrants in 1980. We remembered the words “We still have love to give!”

The biggest challenge in 2008 was that with so few Karen people

One time a family sang in Karen the song “Count Your Many Blessings.” It was moving to hear these words from those who had left family members and friends behind, arriving only with plastic bags of things refugees were allowed to bring. God’s Spirit challenged us to reflect on what blessings we were counting.

in Lancaster, few translation resources were available. Without a common language, we did our best to show care through our actions. The Karen families could not drive, so members took them to medical appointments; helped them apply for jobs; and taught them how to pay their bills, read their mail, and fill out countless forms. We also did fun things together, including going on picnics and hiking.

During the spring and summer of 2010, a new wave of Karen refugees came. Hser Hel, the mother of the first family who came, would call. “We have new arrivals. Who will pick them up for church?” I will never forget when one young mother introduced herself: “I am Mya Ray, your sister-in-Christ!”

One time a family sang in Karen the song “Count Your Many Blessings.” The familiar tune spoke deeply in both languages, reminding us: “Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings, see what God hath done!” It was moving to hear these words from those who had left family members and friends behind, arriving only with plastic bags of things refugees were allowed to bring. God’s Spirit challenged us to reflect on what blessings we were counting.

We started our learning curve by asking, What do they need? We learned to be advocates for refugees. We were blessed to meet employers willing to take risks in hiring people who did not yet speak English. Another gift was volunteer homework helpers who supported the school-age children at home.

And those Sunday school rooms? Thanks to the gifts and resources of retired teachers in the congregation, the classrooms were now filled with children singing Karen songs—and even an ESL class for adults.

We need help!

The years 2010 to 2014 brought waves of new arrivals. Our small group of long-term members felt stretched in our attempts to meet the needs of those being resettled and coming to our church.

A surprise came from Mya Ray, one of the early arrivals who began a two-year service assignment with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Mya Ray learned to provide resettlement support services, and she had the benefit of knowing both languages!

Another gift was a partnership of Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) with Marietta Community Chapel, through which Sean Fitzgerald was placed at Habecker from 2013 to 2015. It marked a significant shift that we came to think of a global mission placement right here in Lancaster County! Together Pastor Karen and Sean remained alert for ways Habecker could model a situation in which those of the dominant culture moved aside and allowed the leadership gifts of newcomers to emerge.

Becoming a “we” congregation

In July 2011, our worship planning committee gathered around the picnic table on the church lawn, enjoying the long summer day and the quiet peace of the surrounding farmland. A question was posed to the two Karen women at the table: Would the Karen group that attended Habecker Mennonite Church be willing to plan the entire worship service on a Sunday morning? What about the third Sunday of the next two months? That timid suggestion resulted in a tradition that remains special seven years later. These Karen-language services involve Karen participants of all generations in serving as moderator, reading Scripture, providing special music, sharing the message, and leading in prayer.

Singing together has been a beautiful connector. Songs of each culture and faith are being passed on to the next generation, and the congregation worships together in a way that is a foretaste of the joys of heaven!

Like those who grew up with Habecker's tradition of a cappella singing, the Karen sing in strong harmony, in three or four parts, and they often include choirs of all ages in the service. Each week a hymn that is found both in the Karen hymnal and in English hymnals is chosen, so the congregation can share the music and words of our faith simultaneously in two languages.

Congregational sharing time has also broadened, now including requests for prayer for Asian homelands. We hear when there is a fire in the camp, when a school has been destroyed, and when new acts of violence or burning of villages in the Karen State leave families without food. The congregation intercedes for a husband hoping his wife and child can soon join him here, and we celebrate new jobs and driver's licenses.

Other common ground

The congregation often marvels at what a good matchmaker God was! In addition to music, a love for farming has become common ground.

The congregation often marvels at what a good matchmaker God was! In addition to music, a love for farming has become common ground. Here was a rural congregation, and the newcomers were village farmers accustomed to growing rice and vegetables, and keeping a few animals.

Here was a rural congregation, with most members coming from a farming background. The newcomers were village farmers accustomed to growing rice and vegetables, and keeping a few animals such as chickens and pigs for family food.

Early on, one of the church members, Wilbur Nissley, researched where to find seeds for vegetables grown in Burma and Thailand. Several acres of land on the neighboring farm of Nelson and Janet Habecker became a site for the Karen community garden. The Karen worked together to grow and harvest the food. Extra food was sold to other Karen families and occasionally to an Asian

market. The homeland flavors were comfort foods, and working outside in the soil was a therapeutic break from Lancaster city living, so different from their life in Asia.

One of the newcomers was July Paw; she was awaiting the arrival of her parents from the refugee camp. When asked what she most wanted to show them, her quick response was, "The church and the garden!"

Another place of common ground has been sewing. For generations, women from three local congregations attended a joint monthly Sewing Circle. By 2010, this group had dwindled to ten to twelve women. Suddenly attendance swelled to twenty or thirty, as Karen women, girls, boys, and a few men came to help knot comforters, put strings in kit bags, and assemble hygiene and school kits. This work was a common language of hands and hearts.

The Karen families had been recipients of comforters, school kits, and infant supplies in the refugee camps, and they were now eager to give back. As they delivered items to the MCC Material Resource Center, Lar Say said with a smile, “In the camp we wondered where these things came from. Now I tell my friends who are still in the camp that we are making them!”

The energetic crew assembles 250 school kits each summer, but Mya Ray’s eyes, glowing with joy, convey more than the numbers do: “The children will be so happy!” These testimonies have breathed new life into the efforts of long-term members. Each year, the Sewing Circle completes around 120 comforters, many donated to MCC and some reserved for new arrivals. Each Sewing Circle evening concludes with praying the Lord’s Prayer and singing the doxology simultaneously in our two languages.

Blessing of babies and children

God’s answer to our prayers to fill the Sunday school rooms with children continues to astound us. From the birth of Moo Lah Law Soe in December 2010 until the present time, more than thirty babies have been born! We hold showers for firstborns as well as for families birthing their first child in the US. In gatherings after Sunday morning worship, the women share a meal of soup and Karen dishes and then gather to open gifts, sing lullabies from both cultures, and share stories of giving birth in the jungle and in the refugee camp.

The Karen women have told us the meaning of Karen names and even taught the “English” women how to carry a baby in a cloth sling. These times have built friendships as we share the love of babies of every culture. Baby showers always conclude by surrounding the parents and offering prayers in two languages, lifting up the family and the child in the womb. In these moments we feel like we are standing on holy ground.

Birthday parties and home worship services

The Karen gather for worship many times through the weekend. Following the intercultural service at Habecker, there is often a Karen home worship service—frequently a thanksgiving service for a child’s birthday—followed by a meal prepared for the family. There are also two Sunday afternoon Karen services held monthly at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. All these events help keep the faith, songs, language, and traditions of the Karen community strong.

Reflections and transitions

When asked to reflect on the Habecker story, Pastor Karen acknowledged that one cannot expect that these outcomes will necessarily be replicated in other contexts. What is important is saying yes to whatever God brings along and then watching with expectancy, but not with particular expectations, for what God will do. For Pastor Karen, it was the attitudes of surrender, awe, and readiness to follow Jesus that allowed this congregation to flourish during the intense time of growth. We could honestly say, “Wow! Look how God is working here!”

Habecker Mennonite Church continues to grow and change as the needs and living situations of the Karen families change. Since September 2016, Chris and Dawn Landes now lead and pastor alongside the Karen leaders and those who have led this congregation for decades. Efforts focus more on leadership development within the congregation and on supporting the growing families.

With all the blessings come some challenges. Karen parents face unique stressors in a country where their children acculturate faster than they do. The elder church members try to walk with youth and young parents, some of whom struggle with addictions and poor choices. Yet our obedience to the call to be the body of Christ across generations, languages, and cultures gives everyone life and hope!

God’s answers to prayer remain evident. As a Karen woman testified, “Our church in the camp prayed that God would prepare a church to welcome us.” Imagine—we were answers to each other’s prayers. To God be the glory!

Additional resources

See photos and reflections from Habecker from November 2014 at this link: <http://jonnychuck.blogspot.com/2014/01/scrapbook-pages.html>. The address of the congregation’s website is <http://habeckerchurch.com/>. We are on Facebook at Habecker Mennonite Church. “Radical Hospitality” is a video about our experience. Find it at <https://>

vimeo.com/185852000. For general information, read *Nine Thousand Nights: Refugees from Burma: A People's Scrapbook*, by Sandy M. Barron (Bangkok: Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010), or watch these movies on refugee resettlement: *The Good Lie* and *All Saints*. The latter narrates the experience of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Smyrna, Tennessee, which was saved by Karen refugees.

About the author

Rhoda Reinford Charles met her husband, Jonathan, after college, when they both taught at Lancaster (PA) Mennonite High School. Jonathan's hobby of photography turned into his career, and for thirty-three years they operated the home business of Charles Studio until turning the business over to a long-term employee in 2013. Since that time, they have spent many hours with people in the Karen community in Lancaster, helping them get to jobs, school, and medical and immigration appointments. They feel blessed to be part of this surprising story.

The gifts of global music in Mennonite Church USA

North American Mennonites speak at least twenty-six different languages in worship, and music in these congregations is just as diverse. In this article, authors give perspectives about music across Mennonite Church USA. Katie Graber discusses singing and cultural appropriation, Byron Pellecer describes the diversity among Hispanic Mennonite congregations, Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone explains the importance of keeping Cheyenne language and culture alive in worship, and SaeJin Lee reflects on the challenges and obligations of being a multicultural community.

Katie Graber

I am a member of Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church and am part of Voices Together: Mennonite Worship and Song Committee, which is preparing a new collection of resources for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

For most of my life, I have attended predominantly white, English-speaking Mennonite churches that sing from hymnals published by the denomination. Since joining the Voices Together committee in 2016, however, I have experienced much more of the diversity in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. I have visited congregations that worship in English, Spanish, Korean, Chin, Cheyenne, Mandarin, Cantonese, Lao, Amharic, French, German, Lingala, and Indonesian.¹ I heard a cappella singing, and singing accompanied with piano, keyboard, guitar, drums, and recordings. I heard songs influenced by traditions from around the world, and European and North American hymns translated into many languages.

The diversity of Mennonite singing today bears witness to both a history of colonization and an embrace of many cultural heritages. Like the church's 1992 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, the new *Voices Together* collection (to be released in 2020) will contain songs in many languages and musical styles. For Mennonites of European origin living in Canada and the US,

1 In addition to travel funded by MennoMedia, I also made visits to ten congregations with committee members Bradley Kauffman and Darryl Neustaedter Barg through a Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with funds provided by Lilly Endowment Inc.

singing music from another culture can be a way to participate in the global church. At the same time, people from a dominant culture must be

In the same way that it is absurd to sing of God's love if we do not seek to embody it, it is absurd to sing a song from an immigrant group if we are not standing with and learning from them.

careful about cultural appropriation and perpetuating stereotypes.

In approaching music from a culture other than one's own, we can learn from theologian Richard Rohr's emphasis on the importance of non-dual thinking: being able to find deeper meaning as we hold together conflicting notions. Consider, for example, the orthodox Christian confession that God is three-in-one, and the conviction that Jesus is fully human and fully divine; these are

not rational truths but spiritual truths. Likewise, believing that the spark of the divine is present in every human blurs the boundaries between "us" and "them" but also places value on individuality and difference. If we can accept opposing ideas like these, we can also acknowledge the truth of these contradictory statements:

- Ignoring music of another culture is disrespectful, but singing its songs is also inauthentic and potentially stereotypes that culture's people.
- Singing a song from a different culture is a way to learn about and respect that culture, but it is also an act of appropriation.
- When I connect with a song from another culture, it is profoundly mine but also still profoundly not mine.

These oppositions cannot be resolved. If I sing a song often enough, it will still never be mine without also being not mine. Sometimes it feels easier to avoid these issues entirely, but it is important to engage these paradoxes.

Furthermore, if we want to respect, pray for, and pray with people of other cultures, music cannot be the end of the engagement. Songs are related to social contexts and power dynamics that we must also recognize. Liturgist and activist Sandra Maria Van Opstal argues that multicultural worship that seeks reconciliation and justice must embody hospitality, solidarity, and mutuality.² That is, in the same way that it is absurd to

2 Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016).

sing of God's love if we do not seek to embody it, it is absurd to sing a song from an immigrant group if we are not standing with and learning from them. We must connect music to refugee relief and peace work. We must acknowledge whose ancestral land we occupy before we sing a Native American song. We must build real relationships with a sister church or through community connections, and then celebrate those relationships through singing. Our worship practices should influence our everyday lives, and the way we inhabit the world should engage the gifts of the global church.

Byron Pellecer

I am an associate conference minister in Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA, and I can testify that Hispanic congregations display a wealth of worship styles. I have preached in and attended worship in congregations whose music is Caribbean style, hymn driven, or "contemporary Christian"—as in megachurches. The spectrum ranges from charismatic to more contemplative in style, content, and tempo. In most Hispanic congregations, one can find a worship team leading with guitar, drums, keyboard, and bass guitar. Also common are mini choirs, dancing groups, and small and big bands. Some instruments are folkloric—handmade—drums and turtle shells. In all cases, I have seen devotion and passion as congregations worship.

The richness in their multicultural and multiracial expressions is a joy to behold. Singing ranges from monolingual to bilingual to trilingual. For most Hispanic congregations, wearing formal attire to worship services is important though not necessarily required. In some cases, attire reflects their cultures and places of origin. Often people play tambourines and dance joyfully, and one hears loud expressions of joy. Someone in the pews might shout praises to God or speak a simple "Hallelujah" or a "Thank you, Jesus," followed by a congregational "Amen."

Regardless of musical style, tempo, or resources used during worship, Hispanic congregations are serious and reverent in their approach to worship. The sanctuary is a holy place where worshipers experience God's presence.

The variety of cultures and styles one sees among Hispanic congregations is a gift. Imagine for a moment worshiping God with merengue or salsa or bachata music. Or imagine worshiping God with Mexican regional music or mariachi or tango. And now, let us worship with hymns and sing in a four-part harmony. Aren't these worship styles examples of a gift?

Receiving this diversity as a gift may call for effort. Creating, promoting, and implementing cultural competencies requires many resources. We may face the temptation to impose one culture or expression on the others. To acknowledge as a gift and to respect the many cultural expressions available to the church will require our commitment and our work.

Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone

I am Northern Cheyenne from Busby, Montana, belong to the White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, and serve on the Mennonite Central Committee Central States board.

Long before the arrival of Christianity and long before our contact with Mennonites, Cheyenne people were blessed with songs from the Creator, a means of worship in all aspects of life. Our congregation believes it is important to continue to worship in Cheyenne, so we can hold

Long before our contact with Mennonites, Cheyenne people were blessed with songs from the Creator. Our congregation continues to worship in Cheyenne, so we can hold on to our culture against a dominant society that has tried to silence our language and stomp out our ways of life.

on to our culture against the pressures of a dominant society that has tried to silence our Cheyenne language and stomp out our ways of life. Our language is becoming extinct, as the number of fluent Cheyenne speakers is dwindling fast, and even fewer people can sing our worship songs. Worship in Cheyenne provides a way to teach our children songs in our language, as we give honor and praise to our Creator.

When Mennonites first came to the Cheyenne people, they brought their style of song and worship. With them came a piano and an organ. It can be argued that if the Mennonites had done things “correctly,” they would have left the piano and the organ and adopted

the use of the drum traditionally used by the Cheyenne people.

Instrumentation aside, the Mennonite missionaries and linguists that came did a great service for the Cheyenne people. They began the first work in Cheyenne language preservation. They introduced traditional Mennonite patterns of worship, and they kept traditional melodies while translating their German and English hymns into Cheyenne.

Meanwhile, Cheyenne Christians continued to receive songs from the Creator in their own language—with Indigenous melodies. For many years, these songs were not welcome in Sunday services of worship, but they were used in prayer meetings, family gatherings, wakes, and funerals. The Cheyenne in Oklahoma were the first to regularly use Cheyenne Indigenous songs in worship services. These were passed along orally, and some have been lost as those who knew them died. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that these songs began to be widely and regularly used, and efforts were made to record and transcribe them. These songs, along with the translated hymns, are what we use in our worship today.³

Cheyenne spiritual hymns are a gift to other Christians, because they serve as a reminder. They remind us of great strength and resilience. These songs of praise to our Creator have endured despite efforts to eradicate our language and our culture.

Saejin Lee

I am a member of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church and Voices Together: Mennonite Worship and Song Committee. I spent my early years in an intentional community founded by my parents in Hwacheon, South Korea. We worshiped together daily, singing a variety of hymns and Taizé songs and contemporary songs. The gatherings were fairly small, with a cappella singing and occasional piano accompaniment. Although the community was not Mennonite, in hindsight my parents would say they had an affinity for Anabaptist theology. Our family moved to Canada when I was six so my father could study at an Anabaptist college there. We attended a Presbyterian Korean immigrant congregation, as we felt most comfortable worshipping in our native culture. When we returned to Korea two years later, my parents and a few other families started an Anabaptist congregation. That congregation and the earlier intentional community were instrumental in fostering my love for worship, especially as children and women were so involved.

When I was fifteen, my family moved to Elkhart, Indiana, so my parents could study at Associated (now Anabaptist) Mennonite Biblical

3 *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992) includes two Cheyenne songs: “Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome” (#9), and “Ehane he’ama” (#78). The story of the transcription of these songs and the development of the Cheyenne hymnbook is told in more detail in David Graber, “The Cheyenne Hymns, the Hymnbook, and Plains Indian Culture,” *Mennonite Life* 61, no. 2 (June 2006), <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-61-no-2/article/the-cheyenne-hymns-the-hymnbook-and-plains-indian/>.

Seminary. We began attending Hively Avenue Mennonite Church (where I still worship). This was the first congregation in which I experienced worship in another culture, and at first it was a difficult transition. The language was foreign and the style of worship was unfamiliar. I was culturally different from the people around me. Over time, though, I came to appreciate Hively's worship as life-giving. I began to feel I belonged, as others identified gifts that I would not have noticed in myself and encouraged me into leadership. In my role as a regular worship and song leader over the years, I have tried intentionally to make room for people who are not cradle Mennonites. For many years, Hively Avenue has connected to international students at AMBS, and recently more Latinx families have joined. Meanwhile, our worship style has remained more or less traditionally European American Mennonite. We are gradually making changes in our worship to reflect the diversity that is present in our church. It has been an exciting and difficult journey.

From a theological perspective, cultivating diversity is important because the Bible tells us that God's invitation to us is to participate in a community that is more than just people who look like us and experience worship as we do. We find inspiration in the story of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the vision of worship described in the book of Revelation, as people of many nations come together to worship God.

But not every congregation is called to become multicultural. I am leery because multiculturalism seems to be becoming the next fad in our churches, as if it were something that could be mastered in several weeks of Sunday school classes on the subject. There is no easy recipe for becoming a multicultural congregation. Becoming multicultural is a lifelong process of learning. It is awkward. It is frustrating. And it takes a lot of commitment, time, hard work, and prayer.

Yet it is precisely the awkward and frustrating exchanges that teach us something about what it means to be a community. Being in community with people from other contexts can deepen our theology and clarify our beliefs. Singing each other's songs, though difficult, enables us to engage each other in love. Whether or not our specific congregation is multicultural, we still ought to engage this work, because challenging experiences help us recognize that the reign of God is larger and more colorful than what we have been accustomed to in our communities of faith. After all, the God who is known to us as Trinity is innately communal, and community is the context in which God calls us to live our faith.

The gifts of global connections in worship

Pratik Bagh

I am a young Mennonite pastor from Chhattisgarh, in central India. Ours was the only Christian family in the rural village where I grew up, and we did not have transportation to get to church, which was far away. For most of my childhood I didn't get what most Christian children take for granted: Sunday worship in a church setting, Sunday school, Christian fellowship, Christian friends. About once a month, a pastor visited our house for a church service. Now and then we attended special services at Christmas or Easter.

A desire to dwell in the Lord's house

Coming out of this experience, I see the church as the first house of a Christian. I value Christian fellowship, and love for the church building is also important for me. Yes, a house becomes a home only when a family lives there, and the church becomes church only when it holds a fellowship of believers. But a person who is homeless may know the worth of a house better than those who are privileged to own one. In the same way, we cannot disregard the value of a house for the church, because it is a place that sustains our life, evokes our emotions, and carries a history.

The church and its worship always attracted me. From early childhood I had a desire to serve the Lord. Dwelling in the house of the Lord was something I longed for. I was inspired by my grandfather's evangelistic and pastoral ministry. I found in myself the same love for the Lord and for preaching the good news.

After training at the institute of another denomination, I returned to Bhartiya General Conference Mennonite Church. It was a challenge for me to serve as a pastor in the Mennonite church, as I had to learn everything from scratch. But when I become a pastor, I found loads of things to appreciate in the Mennonite church. I soon became convinced of Mennonite beliefs. Now I am doing further study in a Mennonite seminary in the United States. There I have had opportunity to think about what worship is, and why and how we worship.

What is worship?

One day I saw a Hindu boy come to the steps of our church. Kneeling down, he made a prayer. He seemed to find the church to be the dwelling place of God. This small incident made me wonder how often we—who know all about the church and sit inside its walls—fail to see that God is present there. How often are we so submissively present amid a realization of God's presence?

Just as that small prayer of that boy can be considered worship, so are many other acts also acts of worship. In my culture, people have sometimes said to me that singing just prepares us for worship, and preaching is the center of our worship; the main thing is to listen to God's Word. Yet it would be shallow to think that singing is not worship but just the means to take us into worship. Worship includes singing hymns, offering praise and thanksgiving, baptism—and any other element that is rendered to God.

When we sing words of adoration and thanksgiving and supplication to God, those words have power. Singing brings us a sense of standing in the presence of the Lord. As a songwriter, I know what it takes to write a song. Whether it is composing a song, singing a hymn, or performing a ritual, what we are doing is not a mere repetition but a fresh representation of what we believe. Likewise, when the gospel is introduced to a person along with the elements of worship, it is a fresh representation that will continue to be reaffirmed and updated in the life of the new believer.

Experiences of Mennonite worship in India

When Mennonites came to India with the gospel early in the 1900s, they introduced the pattern of worship they had practiced in North America. In our area, converts were mostly tribal people who lacked formal education. Especially in the tribal belt, people of Hindu culture are fond of music and singing, and these are important aspects of their religious life. With the coming of a new faith and new forms of worship, the new converts of southern Chhattisgarh needed songs of praise they could sing. Soon the missionaries' hymns were translated by the local people, who were overjoyed to sing again.

Back then, evangelists would travel by bicycle, carrying a lamp and a tent and some cooking equipment. They would stay in a village for a few days. In the evening, they would start singing local songs, and they would play instruments—some of them tribal, and others that had been intro-

duced from Europe. The music attracted people. Then the evangelists would talk about salvation in Jesus.

Those songs were embedded in the hearts of those evangelists and were a source of spiritual nourishment for them. My grandmother, also an evangelist, introduced me to hymns from the Mennonite hymnal and also to those local songs. Early in the morning, at 4:30, she would start singing the old songs, one after another. Those songs are still meaningful and moving for me, and I still use them in my meditation.

Changing patterns in worship and music

More recently, worship and singing took other forms and became more fully the people's own. An example is *Christhapahari*, a worship session that comes from a Hindu practice. Believers praise God continually for an entire day, twenty-four hours, nonstop. The concept is taken from *Asthapahari* ("eight times"): every three hours is counted as one *pahar* (time). People of all ages sing and dance together, with no limit, no oth-

er engagements, no worries—just singing and worshipping. To people in the West, it doesn't sound practical, but to these people, it is spiritually nourishing.

Some local musicians have composed new songs in Hindi and Chhattisgarhi and Oriya, some of which sound like Hindu worship songs. But these songs have become a means of sharing the good news, as for the evangelists in my grandfather's day.

When I became a Mennonite pastor, the only thing I knew well were the old hymns and local songs that my grandmother taught me. In one church where I was pastor, I discovered that the

youth didn't like to come to worship because they found the hymn singing boring. It is painful to me when music becomes a source of division in the church. The adults wanted the youth to come to church, but they taught that the youth needed to "correct" themselves first and learn to enjoy the old hymns, rather than going for the contemporary music.

Why are such things a source of conflict in our churches? I would say that it is not a problem of the youth or the adults but a problem of lack

When Mennonites came to India with the gospel early in the 1900s, they introduced the pattern of worship they had practiced in North America. More recently, worship and singing took other forms and became more fully the people's own.


of preparation. Yes, the church's worship is a communal service, but it is individual too. Like the adults, the youth have their place in the church. We need to make room for each other to find our place in worship. That can only happen when our services are properly planned and when our congregational worship practices are shaped by an intention to experience God together.

Observations from a new context

For three years I have served here in the United States as a volunteer youth minister. It has been a great learning experience for me. I have also been involved in church ministry and in planning worship services. Initially, I didn't feel any connection to the singing during the church service. Then during my first Christmas season here, singing "O Come, O Come, Immanuel" brought tears to my eyes. It became the bridge to connect me to the worship here.

I learned that people take worship very seriously here, with the idea that if we intend to receive best, we should also invest our best. In my congregation here, there is an order for the worship service, with everything being organized and with prior practice. The entire worship hour

is planned in a way that integrates all the pieces and seeks to reach everyone. Singing, reading the Scripture, the sermon, and rituals are linked together and build on one another.



The churches back home are free in their worship and allow nothing to stop them from praising God. They move, dance, sing, and shout. When we are too prepared and too concerned about perfection, we do not allow for the spontaneous work of God's Spirit among us.

Gifts of global connections

Being a student here has given me the opportunity to get connected with people from all across the globe. When I ask other international students here about their spiritual life, most say they miss the worship and prayer practices from back home. There is something about worship that becomes part of who we are. We cannot change it, and it is more than language or culture. But we agree that we

are not complete without others and we have a lot to learn from one another. As the African saying puts it, we are what we are because of others.

As disciples together, our nature is to continue to learn. Our goal in worship is not to be perfect or efficient, but to grow and to become more alive and more dedicated to God. Approaching the throne of God is what worship is meant to be. When we lose sight of this basic purpose, we always face difficulty. But when we come prepared to worship, we receive what we need, and all are blessed by the service. We do not come for singing alone. No part of our worship is greater than the other: through all the elements we worship the Lord.

Although I have learned to appreciate a well-organized worship service, I also feel a need to give space for the Spirit of God to move. The churches back home are very open to the movement of the Spirit. They are free in their worship and allow nothing to stop them from praising God. They move, dance, sing, and shout. When we are too prepared and too concerned about perfection, we do not allow for the spontaneous work of God's Spirit among us in worship.

Coming out of these experiences, my dream is for churches across the globe to appreciate and learn from one another. Following our conviction is more important than following the latest trend, whether in music or dress or understanding. Let's let our worship be inspired not by the latest thing the world offers but by the freshness of patterns the global church has to offer us.

About the author

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Welcoming the gifts of a global church

José-Luis Moraga

The world is getting smaller. Distances that years ago took days and weeks to cross we now traverse in a couple of hours. Peoples, places, and cultures that in the past existed in distant lands may today be just around the corner. Here in Canada and the United States, many white, middle-class, monocultural neighborhoods have become mosaics of people of a variety of skin colors, languages, and cultures. As Paul Kroeker—who trains people in intercultural church planting—writes, “Every tribe and nation is here.”¹ Today, mostly in major urban but also in smaller nonurban centers, we witness the arrival of newcomers as a result of global migration.

Newcomers bring not only their distinctive clothing, food, and other cultural expressions but also their religion. Not all are Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus; newcomers are also Christians from the “global” church. They exemplify what most of the Christian world looks like. Over the last few years, for example, a group of children born outside Canada has begun attending my daughters’ school. They identify themselves as Christians, but most come from countries where Christianity is not the religion of the majority.

What do we mean when we talk about the global church?

In my view, those who use the recently coined term *global church* use it to point to at least three realities. First, they recognize that the majority of people making up the Christian world come not from the West or North but from the South.² They reside outside the Western world.³ Second,

1 Paul Kroeker, *Every Tribe and Nation: Cultures and the Kingdom of God* (Winnipeg: C2C Network, [2017]), 4.

2 In the past, on the basis of mainly political differences between countries, the Global South was identified as the Third World. Then the terminology shifted to Global North and Global South, highlighting economic differences.

3 “Western world” in this context means Europe and North America. In the last few years, missiologists, historians, and theologians have documented that the center of the Christian world lies no longer in the North but in the South. To understand this shift, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); Gary V. Nelson, Gordon W. King, and Terry G. Smith,

to speak of a global church is to acknowledge the cultural diversity and the international and multicultural nature of the church. In theological

If churches in North America and Europe used to shape the agenda of worldwide mission, today the aim is to build egalitarian relationships in which every voice is welcome to contribute to the conversation.

terms, they recognize the catholicity of the church. In this sense, the church as a global body is composed of people from far and near, people from different social, cultural, ethnic, economic, and political backgrounds (Eph. 2:11–22; Rev. 7:9). Third, the term highlights the equality and mutuality of affluent and poor churches around the world. If churches in North America and Europe used to shape the agenda of worldwide mission,⁴ today the aim is to build egalitarian relationships in which every voice

is welcome to contribute to the conversation. The trend is toward partnership relationships between churches.

More importantly, the phrase *global church* points to more than an abstract concept created by missiologists and theologians. The global church is made up of a diverse group of people, seekers and followers of the Messiah Jesus around the world. Some of them live in the richest, safest, and most stable countries of the globe. But most of them do not enjoy a life of privilege. They live mainly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where many of them are poor and where even elementary education is a luxury. Unlike most Christians in the West, they face suffering, persecution, and misunderstanding. According to Latin American pastor and theologian Samuel Escobar, theirs is a grassroots Christianity, “marked by a culture of poverty, an oral liturgy, narrative preaching, uninhibited emotionalism, maximum participation in prayer and worship, dreams and visions, faith healing, and an intense search for community and belonging.”⁵

Today, churches in the West have unique opportunities to welcome, engage, and become a global church in their own places. With a diverse

Going Global: A Congregation's Introduction to Mission beyond Our Borders (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011); and Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011).

4 See Samuel Escobar's comments about “imperial missiology” in *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 26.

5 Escobar, *New Global Mission*, 15.

body comes a variety of gifts. In all their multiplicity, those gifts are meant to be valued and integrated in the life of the church, for they have been given by God (1 Cor. 12). Every person, of whatever background, has received “grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7, NRSV). That grace is meant to be used to enrich and equip the church.

What are the gifts of a global church?

So, what are the gifts of this huge body of Jesus followers around the world? My purpose here is to highlight the gifts that the Global South provides and the potential contribution they can make to our faith communities, especially in the West. I want to clarify, however, that I am not writing from a neutral or objective position. My perspective has been shaped by a variety of life, theological, pastoral, and cross-cultural experiences. My view of the global church comes from below.

One gift of a global church is **cultural diversity**. Diversity in itself is a gift from God, given to humanity and the church. The apostle Paul affirms that we are one body with many parts and gifts (1 Cor. 12; compare Eph. 2:14–16; 4:1–13). A global church brings different skin colours, tastes, cultural expressions, languages, worldviews, and theological and life perspectives. A global church is not a monolithic, monocultural, and homogeneous entity but a diverse body consisting of a variety of members, yet united by God’s grace as embodied in the self-giving sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross (Rom. 3:21–26; Col. 1:21–22).

In our churches, cultural diversity is meant to be embraced, not resisted or ignored. Yet such diversity is missing in many North American churches. Indeed, “if you survey churches during Sunday morning worship, you will find that they are not as culturally diverse as the neighborhood they serve.”⁶ What if churches in North America lived out their faith in the way of intercultural inclusion, acceptance, and solidarity?

A second gift of a global church is **joy and spontaneity in worship**. The integration of emotions into worship is a common experience in a global church. While a regular service may have some structure, in the global church, spontaneity is seen as an appropriate way to respond to God’s presence and work. This response may take the form of singing

6 Kroeker, *Every Tribe and Nation*, 4.

aloud, shouting hallelujah, or crying. Joy is externalized in dancing, clapping, other kinds of body movements, and more.⁷

In the eyes of Christians in the West, displays of joy and spontaneity in worship are confusing and messy, especially if prophecy, dancing, visions, and charismatic experiences are not part of their tradition. But these are biases rooted in culture, sometimes in racism, often in misinformation or in a sense of superiority. Unlike most churches in North America, churches in the Global South sense and experience God as they offer themselves, soul and body, as living sacrifices to God, in joy and spontaneity (Rom. 12:1).

Christians from non-Western societies who migrate to Western countries sometimes also view their brothers and sisters in the North with suspicion. Solemnity, structure, and preparation in worship are seen not as gifts but as formalities. In this case too, judgment arises out of cultural differences, ignorance, and a sense of spiritual superiority. What if churches from Western and non-Western societies, both in North America and the Global South, made an intentional effort to get together, learn from each other's strengths, and practice mutual encouragement—for the sake of the global church?

A third gift is *passion for reaching out*. A global church is a community that engages its neighbours with the good news of the kingdom of God. It takes the "great commission" seriously (Matt. 28:18–20). It has a sense of responsibility and urgency. The sense of responsibility lies in the authority given by the Messiah Jesus to his followers to go into the world and announce the dawn of a new age (Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). The sense of urgency lies generally in an apocalyptic worldview: because the world is coming to an end soon, the church must actively participate in the *missio Dei*.

In contrast, in Canada I have observed fear and reluctance about witnessing to one's faith outside the church.⁸ I understand that this at-

7 Biblical foundations for these expressions of worship are found mainly in the Psalms (30:11–12; 95:1; 98:4–6; 100:1–2; compare Eph. 5:18–20).

8 In this context, "witness" means verbally sharing with others the good news of Jesus. In Mennonite circles, I have perceived two main—usually opposite—understandings of witnessing. For some, to witness is to do acts of justice, to seek peace, and to pursue the common good. For others, it means verbal proclamation of God's story, and its focus is not so much on earthly matters as on spiritual ones and especially on directing people to heaven. I know that this characterization is an oversimplification that excludes conversation about colonization and mission. Yet it helps highlight the difference in approaches. My understanding of witness to the gospel entails both telling God's story

titude has a context. In my view, at least three factors are at work. First, many of us have seen examples of bad evangelism: random confrontation of people on the street, short-term mission trips that fail to establish relationships, unscrupulous televangelism that preys on the gullible, and obnoxious defenses of the faith on the Internet. Fear of being identified with these approaches justifies Canadian Christians in keeping their witness to themselves. And when asked for a good example of evangelism,

A global church understands that its commission and authority come from God and his word. For this reason, people in the Global South live out the missionary task with courage, love, and obedience, and sometimes at great personal cost.

few can think of one. Second, Christians have consciously or unconsciously accepted the assumption that matters of faith belong exclusively in the religious realm, so faith becomes a matter of personal preference. Finally, cultural sensitivity to others' values and views makes many Canadian Christians reluctant to share their faith. They do not want to offend or bother people with a religious outlook they might find disagreeable. Consequently, they choose to keep their faith private.

But a global church understands that its commission and authority come

from God and his word. For this reason, people in the Global South live out the missionary task with courage, love, and obedience, and sometimes at great personal cost. No matter where people are or whom are they speaking to, they reveal a passion to proclaim the good news to anyone open to hearing it. It is not surprising that Christianity is not only surviving but growing in the Global South.⁹ What if churches in North America let their partners in the Global South help them rediscover and rethink their theology and practice of witness?

Fourth, a global church offers the gift of *community*. This may not seem like a unique gift, for the possibility of building communities exists wherever human beings are. Humans are meant to be together. But be-

and doing acts of justice. To me, it is a matter not of one or the other but of both. My theological views on what is known as integral or holistic mission have been profoundly influenced by René Padilla and Samuel Escobar. A brief summary can be found by searching for the online article by C. René Padilla, "What Is Integral Mission?" *Del Camino Network for Integral Mission in Latin America*, accessed April 20, 2018.

9 See Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, especially chapter 1.

cause of economic affluence, access to digital technology, overconsumption, an excess of entertainment options, and putting a high value on personal privacy, people in the West focus on the pursuit of happiness, personal fulfilment, and feeling good about themselves. This complex mixture of economic, cultural, and psychological factors can make it difficult to build meaningful relationships and foster community.

In contrast, a global church has different experiences and understandings of what community is. Many people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America experience community by spending time together, cooking, cleaning, worshiping, serving, sharing stories, and even suffering together. When trouble comes, solidarity steps forward. Generally speaking, the focus in these cultures is on the community, not on the self.¹⁰ In the eyes of people from the West, concepts of personal belongings and private property are “underdeveloped” among such people. But in the South, property, belongings, and a broad range of goods are understood to be there for the sake of the community. I do not mean to suggest that a global church is a perfect community; we know that wherever human beings interact, there is potential for conflicts and divisions. Yet a global church has a richer sense of how important community is for spiritual as well as social well-being. What if all of us who live in Western societies made ourselves available to one another? What if we all made an effort to get away for a bit from the online world, to engage in face-to-face relationships in the offline world?

Fifth, a global church comes bearing the gift of *resilience in the face of suffering*. In my opinion, this resilience is one of the greatest contributions of a global church. Here in the West, our main problems are related to mental health, school shootings, irregular migration, politics, and various pressing international matters. Levels of anxiety and depression and the incidence of eating disorders and addictions of various sorts are growing in North America. The hardships faced by Christians in the Global South are of a different sort. They do not enjoy positions of privilege. Most are at the margins and face situations of social, political, military, religious, and racial conflict. Poverty is a given. As it was for the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 6:3–10), persecution resulting from missionary activities is a real possibility. Yet they are willing to risk their lives for the sake of the gospel (Rom. 5:1–5). They are aware of Jesus’s warnings that his disciples will

¹⁰ Those who are first-generation immigrants to Canada typically do not change this mindset.

be rejected and persecuted (John 15:18–16:4). Despite all the challenges, Jesus followers around the world find meaning, hope, strength, and joy, and they experience resilience in the Spirit of the One who invited them to be part of his great multiethnic family (Gal. 3:26; 4:7; Eph. 2:14–16; 6:10; Rev. 7:9–10).

An invitation to welcome one another

The concept of a global church may be new, yet its roots can be found in the New Testament account of the church's growth. In the beginning, Jesus's movement was mostly a Jewish movement. When his followers had spread throughout the Mediterranean world, the movement became empire wide and multiethnic.¹¹ Eventually, the movement reached Rome, but not without challenges and tensions. Those tensions have their origin in cultural and theological differences.

From the outset, the church in Rome was composed of Jewish and non-Jewish ("Gentile") followers of the Messiah. Jewish followers of the Messiah (many of them occupying positions of leadership in the church) assumed that believers in Jesus as Messiah were still obliged to keep the law of Moses. Non-Jewish followers of the Messiah were oriented to a type of faith in Jesus Christ that did not require observing Jewish law. They found Paul's understanding of the way of Jesus more appealing.

After the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius in AD 49, the churches¹² continued under non-Jewish Christian leadership. Over time, they became disconnected from the synagogue and Jewish traditions. When Nero became emperor, he let the Jews return to Rome. Some Jewish followers of Jesus returned to Rome, perhaps hoping to pick up where they had left off. But in the five years the Jewish and Gentile believers had been apart, the differences between them had widened. The challenge they now faced was how to learn to live together peaceably, despite their theological differences.¹³

11 The book of Acts presents a good picture of this transition.

12 The church in Rome was not a single body of people who gathered on a Sunday morning. Rather, it consisted of small clusters of people who gathered as followers of Jesus in various households in Rome.

13 A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 7. I think this explains Paul's advice toward the end of the letter, where he uses the phrase "one another" repeatedly (in 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16).

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that Paul's main concern in his letter to the Romans was about the unity of these assemblies. After laying out a long, complex argument, the apostle advocated for the unity of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:1–8). The climax of Paul's argument is the exhortation to “welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (15:7, NRSV).¹⁴ As New Testament scholar Gordon Zerbe observes, “everything in Romans leads, in one way or another, to this dramatic and concluding exhortation.”¹⁵

The Greek word Paul uses, *proslambanō*, conveys the idea of warm welcome and wholehearted acceptance (compare its use in Rom. 14:1, 3; Philem. 17).¹⁶ To Paul, God's action through the Messiah Jesus is the creation of a new humanity (Rom. 5–8). Paul affirms that whoever puts her trust in Jesus is incorporated into God's covenant people regardless of her cultural, social, national, and ethnic background (Rom. 3–4). All of these are gifts from God because of his radical generosity, his grace.

The church is built on the foundation of the Messiah. In his sacrifice he was an agent of peace in the world, embodying unity where divisions are commonplace. From eternity, God dreamed of building a global multiethnic community of people who would embody his love, justice, blessing, and peace in the world. That is why Jesus's disciples have been sent to the world (Matt. 5:13–16). A global church is a gift for a fragmented, self-centered, and independent humanity. A global church offers the possibility of embodying unity, while acknowledging and embracing diversity, by welcoming the gifts that followers of Jesus from every nation, tribe, and language bring to the table.

About the author

José-Luis Moraga was born and raised in Santiago. His background is Chilean Pentecostal, and he has embraced Anabaptist theology. He serves on the pastoral team at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

14 My understanding of Paul's letter to the Romans is that everything he writes about justification by faith, being in Christ, life in the Spirit, and God's faithfulness to Israel is directly related to the situation of the Roman churches described above. All the “one another” language of the letter is built on the foundation of what Paul has said in the first eleven chapters.

15 Gordon M. Zerbe, “From Retributive to Restorative Justice in Romans,” *Direction* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 43.

16 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 480.


The journey of reconciliation at Holyrood Mennonite Church

Werner De Jong

Holyrood Mennonite Church of Edmonton, Alberta, is a multicultural congregation consisting primarily of older traditional Mennonites and younger West African immigrants. Together we are participating in the adventure of becoming one body that shares leadership and responsibility for all aspects of our life together. The journey is never boring.

There's no knowing where you might be swept off to

Near the beginning of J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, Frodo speaks memorable words to his fellow hobbit Sam about the adventure that lies before them: "Remember what Bilbo used to say. It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you



At Holyrood, we began our common journey with no clear idea of where it might take us, yet we are finding ourselves transformed into greater Christ-likeness through walking the way of reconciliation together.

don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to." While their odyssey was fraught with risk, the journey was well worth it, with both characters being transformed through their participation in the mission to assure that darkness did not consume their world.

Our story has also been one of transformation. At Holyrood, we began our common journey with no clear idea of where it might take us, yet we are finding ourselves transformed into greater Christlikeness through walking the way

of reconciliation together. As we have sought to respond to the leading of God's Spirit, we have found ourselves feeling abundantly blessed by the gifts we offer each other, and also feeling lost and confused over our differences.

Wisdom for the journey

My intent here is to share what we at Holyrood are learning in our quest to integrate two very different cultural groups into one church body. What gifts and struggles have we discovered along the way?

After worship on a Sunday several years ago, a senior member of our congregation told me, “I just want you to know that I don’t like the Af-

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rican music. I find the *saa saa*¹ and the djembe irritating. The choruses are repetitive. I prefer the theological richness of the songs in our Mennonite hymnal.” Immediately I tensed up, but his next words warmed my heart: “Having said that, I want you as our pastor to ensure that we as a congregation never stop singing the African songs, because it’s not just about what I want. As a multicultural congregation, we must be hospitable and make space for each other.”

The wisdom he voiced is foundational for all congregations that undertake the adventure of learning to be one diverse people in Christ. His perspective also demonstrates the growth potential for our church members as we embrace the journey of becoming global congregations.

Our common journey began in 2001, when Holyrood sponsored four young Liberian men as refugees. Today 40 percent of the congregation of about one hundred active members, with an average Sunday worship attendance of about seventy, consists of West Africans, primarily from Liberia, but also from Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria. Shortly after I arrived as pastor in 2006, I asked one of our Liberian members, “Why did you stay in this church once you arrived in Canada?” His answer was instructive: “We did visit other churches in Edmonton, and every church welcomed us. Week by week they welcomed us. But it went no further than that. Holyrood was the one church that invited us to use our gifts to help serve the congregation. The reason we are here is because we not only want to be welcome, we also want to participate.”

Over time this participation has deepened, as God is teaching us that we need each other. We are learning that we all benefit from the vari-

1 The *saa saa* is a gourd/bead percussion instrument.

ous gifts we bring to the table. Toward that end, we have made significant progress in embracing the gifts of all our members. Today we have six elders: four are African, including the congregational chair, and two are Caucasian. We sing Western and African worship songs. We have Western and African preachers, Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, and ushers. Our efforts to incorporate different peoples into one body have brought many blessings, which can be broadly summarized using three categories: opportunity for global church engagement, renewal of our spiritual lives through exposure to our different faith traditions, and strengthening of community life.

The gift of global church engagement

Embracing people of other cultures in our congregations provides a natural bridge to the wider church, and participation in the global church body is critical at a time of increasing nationalism. It doesn't just help

Embracing people of other cultures in our congregations provides a natural bridge to the wider church, and participation in the global church body is critical at a time of increasing nationalism.

us overcome isolation in our own congregations; it also stands as a witness to the world that unity and reconciliation among diverse peoples is possible.

Through our Liberian members, most of whom come from a Pentecostal background, we have been in partnership with two related Liberian Free Pentecostal groups since 2008. My wife, Joanne, and I have made numerous trips to Liberia for the sake of this partnership, and to our delight we have discovered that our Pentecostal partners, who

have lived through a brutal civil war, are eager to have us share our Anabaptist understanding of God's gift of peace.


In 2010 I was honored to be keynote speaker at the annual national conference of the Free Pentecostal Mission of Liberia. The conference ground we met on was riddled with bullet holes, and many church members had been killed on that very land. The theme for the conference was chosen specifically in light of our partners' new understanding of what a Mennonite speaker might have to offer: "Jesus is our peace, for he has knocked down the dividing wall between us." Later, I was told that this theme was so important that our partners took the risk of inviting a

non-Pentecostal to be their speaker for the first time in their decades-long history.

The blessings of the partnership flow both ways. Holyrood has been privileged to host two return visits from a Liberian Pentecostal pastor, and her teaching has been both inspiring and challenging, encouraging us to trust God, seek God in fasting and prayer, depend on the Holy Spirit, and engage more in evangelism. Further, when Leymah Gbowee, the winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her war-ending work with the women of Liberia, was in Edmonton to receive an honorary doctorate, she graciously accepted my wife's spontaneous invitation to address our congregation, having learned of our Liberian members and partnership. Her message was strong and clear: "You have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others."

The gift of spiritual renewal

The merger of North American Anabaptists and African Pentecostals has



Having survived a civil war, our Liberian members display a faith that is not mere intellectual belief in the existence of God but active trust and conviction that the God who was present in severe trial can be counted on to be present in any life situation.

enhanced our spiritual lives. Our African members contribute vibrancy and passion to our worship services, especially when it is the African team's turn to lead the singing. They engage their entire bodies in worship, clapping and dancing and raising hands. Over the years a few traditional Mennonites have learned to clap as well. Some even sway a little!

More than adding life to congregational worship, Holyrood's African members enrich the congregation through their strong faith in God's goodness and strength. Having survived a civil war, they display a faith that is not mere intellectual belief in the existence

of God but active trust and conviction that the God who was present in severe trial can be counted on to be present in any life situation. When Joanne struggled to find work, she asked a Liberian woman in the congregation to pray with her. The next morning at 6:00 the phone rang. When Joanne wearily answered it, the voice on the other end of the line enthused, "Time to pray! God will surely make a way!" Indeed, Joanne was soon back at work. To witness such faith is a blessing to those of us

who have grown up in a skeptical secular society. We benefit greatly from encountering strong enthusiasm for prayer and from hearing regular testimonies about answered prayer.

In our experience, African spiritual vitality energizes a missional impulse, integrating the interior life of devotion with the exterior life of action. Enthusiasm for mission, and evangelism in particular, seems to be part of the DNA of African Christianity. It is common, for example, for Holyrood's African members to invite friends to church. At a time when many churches in the West are in numerical decline, we can learn from our global brothers and sisters' experience of and passion for bearing verbal witness to their faith in Jesus.

Of course, learning from each other's spiritual traditions flows in both directions. At Holyrood, many of our Western members volunteer time to serve their neighbours in practical ways at the Food Bank, the Mennonite Central Committee thrift store, or Habitat for Humanity. We also emphasize and seek to live out the traditional Anabaptist values of working for peace, justice, and reconciliation in our relationships, whether in our church community or with our neighbours. Our African members have expressed appreciation for this Anabaptist peace emphasis, and have


Even when we do not fully understand each other across the cultural divide, the simple, sincere effort to be God's people together helps break down walls of fear, prejudice, and indifference between us. Our very congregational life has become a school of reconciliation.

shared some of it with their fellow Africans in the city. As a result, I have been invited by the Liberian Friendship Society of Edmonton to speak on the theme of peacemaking, and on a few other occasions I have been asked by Liberians who do not attend Holyrood to help reconcile strained or broken relationships. Incorporating different peoples into our congregations and being open to each other's faith traditions opens new doors for missional opportunities.

The gift of strengthened community life

A third joy of seeking to be one people of God together is the wonderful enrichment of our congregation's community life. In a world often divided along racial lines, nothing warms my heart more than to witness the genuine and mutual affection between Holyrood's diverse members. Even

when we do not fully understand each other across the cultural divide, the simple, sincere effort to be God's people together helps break down walls of fear, prejudice, and indifference between us. Our very congregational life has become a school of reconciliation, in which we are all learning to respect and appreciate people who are different from us, to see the good and the potential in each other, and to recognize each other as cherished brothers and sisters in Christ. As this school of reconciliation trains us



I have become a better pastor through Holyrood's African members, whose very way of being, as those coming from a community-based society, challenges my Western tendency toward individualism.

in multicultural understanding, we are better able to engage in mission. When we serve our neighbours together, as a visible community, our unified actions are a witness that reconciliation is a reality in Jesus Christ.

The women's group at Holyrood is leading the way in strengthening our community life. The group, half Africans and half Westerners, meets bi-weekly for fellowship, worship, and Bible study. As a group, they regularly visit congregational members who are sick, grieving, or simply in need of encouragement. They bring gifts and encourage mutual aid, which is strong among Holyrood's African members and supplements this historic strength of the Anabaptist tradition.


I have become a better pastor through Holyrood's African members, whose very way of being, as those coming from a community-based society, challenges my Western tendency toward individualism. I believe others in our congregation have been similarly affected. Last September, one of Holyrood's Liberian mothers, who has four young children, died tragically when her vehicle was struck by a runaway stolen truck. A Liberian family in our congregation opened their home as a place for the community to gather, and almost every day for a month dozens of people visited to support the grieving family. The hospitality was overwhelming, as food was carefully provided each day for all the guests, without complaint and in a spirit of solidarity. As many of Holyrood's traditional Mennonites learned, the most important thing was simply showing up, to be part of the grieving community. We didn't need to say anything. It was enough just to sit and be present, which further solidified the bonds between us. In the midst of tragedy, it was a privilege to participate as community in

this grieving process, as evening after evening we simply sat still, or talked, or praised God and cried together.

No adventure worthy of the name is without challenges

As enriching as our journey has been, the way has not always been smooth; no adventure worthy of the name is without challenges. The challenges we have encountered, broadly speaking, are of two kinds: discomfort with differences and the changes they bring, and difficulties around navigating power dynamics.

Becoming close to those who are different from us necessitates change. It forces us to rethink a lot of things, and that process makes



At our leadership meetings we frequently ask each other questions like these: How does your culture understand this question? How would you normally approach this situation? We are also blessed with a few leaders gifted in cross-cultural understanding.

us uncomfortable. At Holyrood we have known various sources of friction. These include our different ways of prioritizing time, our different understandings of the relationship between money and friendship, and our divergent worship styles. Less frequently, questions arise about theological differences. On account of these things, we have had a few members from both sides of the congregation leave and join monocultural congregations.

For the large majority who have chosen to remain together, our common journey requires a good measure of humility, forbearance, and generosity on all

sides, as we lay aside personal preferences in favor of the common good, are patient with each other's strange ways, and give each other sufficient space to express our God-given gifts. In practical terms, we have found it helpful to address our differences head-on. One fall, we dedicated each week of our adult Sunday school class to comparing Canadian and West African culture. It was the best-attended class in my twelve years at Holyrood, a sign of our desire to know each other better. Further, at our leadership meetings we frequently ask each other questions like these: How does your culture understand this question? How would you normally approach this situation? We are also blessed with a few leaders gifted in cross-cultural understanding, who take the initiative, when necessary, to interpret the words or actions of one culture to the other.

The other significant challenge we face is related to power, especially with respect to how we make decisions in the congregation. In Western culture, people readily think in terms of their own individual needs, and most people feel empowered to express their opinions as individuals. In West African culture, as in many global cultures, people think first in terms of the needs of the community and therefore do not have the same sense of empowerment to express individual opinions. Rather than individuals voicing individual opinions, leaders are looked to in order to express the voice of the community.

At Holyrood, this dynamic is most evident at our congregational meetings, which are often poorly attended by our African members, apart from a few leaders. Those Africans who are absent understand that their voice will be heard through their leaders, while the Westerners who are present wonder why so few African members are present. Given this context, it is difficult to make decisions that fairly represent the entire congregation. It is good for Westerners to understand that the voice of one African leader at such meetings likely represents the voices of many others. On the other hand, we also continue to encourage all members to attend our congregational meetings. This is an ongoing journey, and at present the African elders and I have frequent meetings with the African membership, typically after a Sunday worship service, to seek their input regarding various congregational concerns.

Participating in the church's multicultural future

In the end, while we may not always manage to stay on our feet, we are glad that God has swept us together into our shared adventure. We are being blessed, challenged, and transformed by the gift of each other. We need each other, and we are learning to appreciate and depend on each other. It is a privilege to participate together in God's mission, to shine the light of God's reconciling love into a world darkened by division. In an increasingly multicultural world, the future of the church is multicultural, and we are grateful to be part of it.

About the author

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Aspiring to be a three-mile-an-hour people

Jonathan Bonk

Monocultural congregations in a globalized world

As a people, Mennonites seem to reside somewhere on a line between two polar ends of a rural-urban continuum, holding widely divergent political, social, and theological perspectives whose roots can be traced to geography and regional demographics.

Mennonites who live in culturally diverse cities are sometimes quietly condescending toward those who live in smaller, less ethnically diverse, more “isolated” or “insular” communities. Urban Mennonites may think of themselves as being more attuned to the pressing issues of the day, and hence more obviously compliant with popular notions of what it means to be a multicultural church. Their congregations have a better chance—albeit seldom realized—of being racially diverse: They come into natural contact with minorities every day. The refugees they sponsor settle naturally into their cities. University student exchange programs give them opportunity to host young people from around the world. They also tend to be socially and politically self-defined as liberal or progressive.

Rural or small-town Mennonites, on the other hand, are even less racially and culturally diverse than their urban counterparts. Minority groups are the stuff of the news—and, if one is in the United States, that could mean “news” with a xenophobic bent. It is difficult to know how or where refugees from highly urbanized cultures might fit into a racially and religiously homogeneous rural community, with its more limited vocational and employment opportunities. In these settings, there are few universities or colleges to which international students are naturally attracted, and young adults from these communities are often moving away to pursue educational and employment opportunities elsewhere. That such communities tend to be instinctively conservative, or preservative, both socially and politically, is natural.

Thanks to an abundance of Mennonite international nongovernmental organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service, church members from across the rural-urban continuum

have opportunity to converge through service opportunities at home and beyond. But is this enough to make a local church a multicultural congregation? Probably not, although it can raise an awareness that sees beyond the confines of monoculturalism.

Since we Mennonites regard the Bible as our guide to both ultimate meaning and everyday behavior, in our quest to understand what it

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means, practically, to be an authentically global congregation, we can begin on the same page.

Global demographics and monocultural congregations

For more than two centuries, Western Christianity's relationship to the rest of the world has been mediated by what Latin American missiologists René Padilla and Samuel Escobar characterized as "managerial missions."

I remember when the long-anticipated *World Christian Trends AD 30–AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual*

Christian Megacensus made its debut.¹ Among the most extraordinary reference works ever published, this impressive supplement to the second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*—10 inches wide, 12 inches tall, 2½ inches thick, and weighing 4½ pounds—comprises 934 dense, three-column pages of statistics, analyses, forecasts, and maps. Included is a 59-page overview of "1,500 global plans to evangelize the world." This was the distillation of two centuries of Western theorizing about world mission and global Christianity.

Such tools have been a mainstay of Western global evangelization efforts since William Carey published *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens: In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings Are Considered* in 1792.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this way of thinking, of course. We humans seem to require a sense of place, purpose, and direc-

1 David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends AD 30–AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001).

tion in order to thrive. As Mennonites, our faith provides this for us. We came from somewhere for a reason. We are going somewhere for a reason.

For more than two centuries, Western Christianity's relationship to the rest of the world has been mediated by "managerial missions." But the Christian faith is not fundamentally organizational but relational, personal, and hence incarnational.

Our lives should and can be lived purposefully. Or put another way, our faith answers the three big questions confronting every human being: (1) Who is God? (2) Who am I? and (3) What does that mean?

But the Christian faith is not fundamentally organizational but *relational*, *personal*, and hence *incarnational*. No matter the country, the culture, or the language, these constitute the essential elements of Christian servant encounter with the other.

It is perhaps for this reason that a closer analysis of managerial mission methods reveals a gap between well-intended and energetically applied strategies, on the one hand, and the actual growth of the church worldwide, on the other. According to figures appearing in the January 2018 issue of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, between 1900 and 2018 the number of self-confessed Christians increased nearly fivefold: from 557,755,000 to 2,506,835,000. That is remarkable!

But as impressive as such numbers at first seem, and despite the deployment of hundreds of thousands of Christian foreign missionaries over the past two centuries, the numerical growth of the global church has not kept pace with population growth. Whereas in 1900 Christians represented 34.4 percent of the total world population, in 2018 that proportion has slipped to 33 percent. While global annual population growth is projected at 1.18 percent, annual growth trends for Christianity are projected to be 0.11 percent. It is as though we were living in the land of the Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Alice has been running as fast as she can for a long time but getting nowhere:

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

“A slow sort of country!” said the Queen. “Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

Behind these numbers, of course, is the more encouraging demographic shift that has taken place in the last fifty years. Beyond its old Western heartlands, Christianity is growing at an annual rate of 2.87 percent in Africa, in Asia at 2.13 percent, and in Latin America at 1.20 percent. This is in contrast to Europe (including Russia) where it is creeping along at 0.04 percent, and to Northern America with a growth rate of 0.58 percent.²

How Jesus was multicultural

It is easy to forget how laughably parochial Jesus was by standards then and now. And yet we’ve been taught from infancy that God so loved

It is easy to forget how laughably parochial Jesus was by standards then and now. And yet we’ve been taught from infancy that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to the much-disdained mixed-blood world of Galilee of the Gentiles, as a helpless infant, born to an unwed peasant.

the world that he sent his Son to the much-disdained mixed-blood world of Galilee of the Gentiles, as a helpless infant, born to an unwed peasant mother and carpenter stepfather in an occupied corner of a brutally oppressive empire.

Who was this obscure Galilean? Unlike Caesar, the greatest of his contemporaries—a successful general, an outstanding orator, and one of the most highly regarded Latin prose authors of his day—Jesus left no written report or autobiography. He vanquished no enemies in war. He held no important office. He was not part of the Jewish religious, political, or economic establishment. None of the writings of the

most important chroniclers of his era say anything about him.

Available records are quite skimpy: four Gospels comprising a total of just under 65,000 words—the length of a short novel. Because each Gospel provides an account of the same person, there is understandable

2 Todd M. Johnson et al., “Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 1 (January 2018): 25.

duplication and overlap, along with some minor discrepancies. That's all we have. It is from these Gospels that we learn about Jesus and from Jesus, and about ourselves as his followers.

We know little about his growing-up years, when he and his parents finally returned from Egypt to Nazareth (Matt. 2:19–23). We are told that, like any other child, he had to learn obedience (Luke 2:51; Heb. 5:8). We

At the level of everyday life, who determined Jesus's priorities? It was the men, women, and children he encountered, who—according to the Gospel record—hounded and pursued him from place to place, hoping to derive some personal benefit or to at least indulge their curiosity.

also know that Jesus had brothers and sisters, since Joseph and Mary continued to have children. Jesus would have been the eldest son (Matt. 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21). Presumably Joseph and his sons worked as carpenters. They were devout, attending the local synagogue (Luke 4:16) and making an annual trip to the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41).

What Jesus was like as a boy growing up with his playmates and friends we do not know. The Gospels mention only his seemingly inconsiderate behavior as an adolescent, when he remained behind in Jerusalem as his parents began their return journey home, thus causing

them consternation. Aside from this, we learn only that “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52, NIV).

We read in Luke 4 that after his grueling forty days of temptation in the wilderness, he visited the synagogue in Nazareth, “where he had been brought up.” There, in his home synagogue, this well-known local young man read from Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18–19).

When he identified himself as the subject of this passage, his listeners' pride in their hometown boy turned to shock and rage at his audacity: “All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.” Jesus narrowly escaped the mob and embarked on his three-year mission to save the world.

Even for the last three, eventful years of his life, Gospel accounts provide only selective information on how he busied himself in accomplishing his Father's plans for reconciling the world. But this fact makes what we read even more compelling.

The world is a big place to save in only three years! How did Jesus go about it?

In our managerial world, interruptions are considered antithetical to what we're supposed to be doing. But from a Gospel perspective, it may be these very interruptions that put us in touch with God's purposes for us.

Did Jesus travel to the uttermost parts of the earth? No. He repeatedly insisted that his will was to do the will of his Father in heaven right where he was. But what—exactly—was that will? At the level of everyday life, who determined his priorities? It was the men, women, and children he encountered, who—according to the Gospel record—hounded and pursued him from place to place, hoping to derive some personal benefit or to at least indulge their curiosity.

Jesus was easy to interrupt, because he was usually on foot. Kosuke Koyama

evocatively describes Jesus as our *three mile an hour God*.³

At Yale Divinity School, I used to have students in my evangelism class read the Gospels, locating and removing all instances of interruptions in the life of Jesus and his responses to them. As they read, students would be asking themselves, “How and why did this person see in Jesus the possibility of good news for them in their situation? How did Jesus respond to the person’s notion of good news?” Off the students would go. By the time they returned to class the following week—with all interruption-related content stripped from the synoptic accounts of Jesus’s life and ministry—the Gospels were in tatters. They began to see with fresh understanding how Jesus lived out the good news. God in Jesus made his priority ordinary men and women with desperately personal needs for acceptance, healing, deliverance, and forgiveness. He responded to each one compassionately and constructively. This was good news!

In the ways and words of Jesus and his community of disciples we uncover the DNA at the core of a local congregation that can love the world

3 Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

as Jesus loved the world. It is fidelity to Jesus's way of living that makes any congregation, however rural or isolated, a genuinely multicultural church.

In our managerial world—governed by detailed plans, narrowly focused statements of purpose, packed schedules, and precise timekeeping—interruptions are considered antithetical to what we're supposed to be doing. But from a Gospel perspective, it may be these very interruptions that put us in touch with God's purposes for us, by moving us beyond our predictable comfort zones. It is our response to interruptions that ensures that we become what God intended us to be, profoundly multicultural local congregations.

What kinds of interruptions should we expect, and whom should we be prepared to welcome?

If we knew with any precision the answers to the kinds of interruptions we should expect and whom we should be prepared to welcome, we

Loving these religiously, politically, judicially stigmatized neighbors as ourselves—bringing them into the warmth, acceptance, and security of our inner circles of fellowship—is how we love God. It is how we become genuinely multicultural. There is no other way.

would not consider the interruptions interruptions! But based on Jesus's Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4, on his final judgment day portrayal in Matthew 25, and on the priorities characterizing his short ministry, we must surely begin with those marginalized by our culture: strangers, enemies, poor folks, sick folks, prisoners—and other socially, religiously, politically, or judicially stigmatized folks. Loving these neighbors as ourselves—that is, bringing them into the warmth, acceptance, and security of our inner circles of fellowship—is how we love God. It is how we become genuinely multicultural. There is no other way.

We must resist the lie, perpetuated by Caesar and his ilk across the ages, that men and women bear the state's image, and that on this basis they can be legally mistreated, ignored, imprisoned, deported, or destroyed. As Jesus pointed out (Matt. 22:21), Caesar can put an image of his head on a piece of metal or on a self-aggrandizing monument. But Caesar has no ultimate jurisdiction over human beings. They do not bear his image. To render human beings, made in the image of God, to Caesar is idolatry.

How does Jesus come into the church?

It is through the human beings marginalized, stigmatized, and delegitimized by Caesar that Jesus himself visits us—the hungry, the thirsty, the disenfranchised, the imprisoned, the stranger, the enemy. On that day when sheep and goats are separated, Jesus will not be looking for doctrinal statements or church memberships or short-term mission junkets but for practical kindness to these kinds of folks. Nothing more.

If faith, in our congregations, does not mean this, then ours is a hollow, self-serving faith, far removed from the impulses and priorities of the One whose name we bear. Such congregations will never fulfill their purposes in any biblical sense. They will be mere sectarian enclaves of

self-protection, self-justification, and self-service, keeping outsiders at bay—the very antithesis of Jesus.

Anytime we think of ourselves as “we,” we are in danger. This is particularly true for comfortable congregations in the richest countries in the world. In Revelation 2 and 3, it is the church in Laodicea that faces the most profound existential crisis that any congregation can face: Jesus is not in the church but outside knocking, asking for admission.

When Jesus urged his disciples to “open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35),

he had just finished his conversation with a Samaritan women rendered invisible to the disciples by her religion, gender, multiple marriages, and ethnicity.

The kind of realistic multiculturalism to which we are called does not require a telescope that enables us to see distant places. It begins and continues with those who are estranged from our own culture, in our own immediate surroundings.

Open your eyes!

In chapter 2 (“Telescopic Philanthropy”) of *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens describes Mrs. Jellyby as “a pretty . . . woman, of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if . . . they could see nothing nearer than Africa!” Dickens goes on to write that Mrs. Jellyby, her house, her husband, her children, and her boarders—all showed marked signs of neglect. As Dickens has her explain, with just a tinge of pride: “The Africa project at present employs my whole time [and] involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and

with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next

A genuinely multicultural congregation will always be a three-mile-an-hour church, welcoming the interrupting Jesus, whatever his circumstances, however inconvenient and time-consuming his needs, and whatever his social or racial guise.

year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger.” Dickens published this book in serial form in 1852–53, at a time when evangelical missionary zeal in Britain began to flourish. Self-confident, evangelistically assertive Christianity in its various forms was the religious expression of British imperial power.

The kind of realistic multiculturalism to which we are called and for which we have been equipped does not require a telescope that enables us to see distant

places. It goes beyond the esoteric image of peoples of different colors and languages mingling in the same congregations on Sunday mornings! It begins and continues with those who are estranged from our own culture, in our own immediate surroundings. If the racial demographics of our context happen to be diverse, then our multiculturalism will include those from other races and countries of origin. But a genuinely multicultural congregation will always be a three-mile-an-hour church, welcoming the interrupting Jesus, whatever his circumstances, however inconvenient and time-consuming his needs, and whatever his social or racial guise.


About the author

Jonathan Bonk is director of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (www.dacb.org). For sixteen years prior to his retirement to Winnipeg in 2013, he was director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, and editor of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. He was raised as a missionary kid in Ethiopia. He and his wife, Jean, are active members of the Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship.

Intercultural global theology

Hyung Jin Kim Sun

The adjective *global* shows up often these days. We use it in phrases such as global warming, global leaders, global market, global village. Christians talk about global Christianity and global church. Frequent use of this adjective indicates that we are aware that we are living in a globalized society and that Christianity has become a global religion. Still, it surprises many Western Christians to learn that the majority of Christians do not live in Western countries but in Asia, South America, and Africa. The same is true of the Anabaptist-Mennonite branch of Christianity in particular. In 2015, Mennonite World Conference published statistics showing that only 35 percent of people in its member bodies live in the Global North, whereas 65 percent reside in the Global South.¹ The



It is crucial that we undertake the work of examining and revising our theological tradition, because Mennonite theologies in North America, particularly theologies taught in academic settings, have been predominantly Western and male-centric.

fact is, Mennonite faith is no longer a Euro-American reality. And while the proportions doubtless differ by region, conference, and country in North America, people from other cultural backgrounds and faith traditions are joining our traditional churches, and immigrant churches are emerging and flourishing within Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Our theology needs to change

As a result of these changes, Mennonite churches in North America are making efforts on a local and a national level to

include sisters and brothers from other cultural backgrounds. Having a potluck, organizing a joint worship service, supporting immigrant churches, and developing a new song and worship collection: these are a few examples of efforts to welcome and include people not raised in traditional Mennonite contexts. And in addition to these endeavors, I would argue

1 MWC World Directory 2015 Statistics, accessed May 10, 2017, https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/mwc_world_directory_2015_statistics.pdf.

that it is crucial that we undertake the work of examining and revising our theological tradition, because Mennonite theologies in North America, particularly theologies taught in academic settings, have been predominately Western and male-centric.²

As Christians become aware that Christianity has become a global religion, we begin to realize that every theology is shaped in profound ways by its context and that we need to engage with theologies we had not been exposed to before. Swiss Pentecostal theologian Walter Hollenweger asserts:

*All theologies—including the biblical ones—are contextually conditioned. There is no pure gospel. The gospel appears to us per definitionem in an incarnate form. We have no access to a gospel outside its incarnation in culture, language, thought patterns, etc. That is why there is nothing wrong with theology being contextually conditioned. But to call a gospel which is heavily dependent on a capitalist society and on Aristotelian philosophy the “pure gospel” or even “the full gospel” is a grave overstatement. It usually takes others to show us how conditioned, parochial and ideologically captive our own theology is. Even if once we could ignore such voices, now we can no longer do so.*³

To assert that all theologies are contextual is not to say that all theology is relative. Rather, it is to acknowledge that every theological perspective has emerged in a particular time and space, in engagement with specific cultures, issues, and events. Theologians—from the authors of the books of the Bible to the early church fathers, from major Reformation figures of the sixteenth century to thinkers of our time—have all done theology in an effort to make sense of God to their communities which faced particular issues in specific situations. Missionaries have also endeavored to present the gospel in ways that communicated with and could be understood by the cultures who received their message. Although contextual theology may be seen as a new concept, the practice of contextualizing theology has existed throughout Christian history.

2 Mennonite feminist theologians such as Lydia Harder and Carol Penner have criticized the patriarchy still present in Mennonite theology and tradition. Taking a further step, I argue that Mennonite theology and tradition are also Western-centric.

3 Walter Hollenweger, “Intercultural Theology: Some Remarks on the Term,” in *Towards an Intercultural Theology: Essays in Honor of J. A. B. Jongeneel*, edited by Martha Fredriks, Meindert Dijkstra, and Anton Hontepen (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 90–91.

Contextualization happens not only when Christians go to a new region but also whenever a community experiences a major shift or a new challenge emerges. Thus, theologian and philosopher LeRon Shults argues that “in every generation Christian theology is faced with the task of articulating the intuitions of the biblical tradition about the significance of Jesus Christ in a way that engages its own cultural context.”⁴ From the beginning of the Anabaptist movement, Mennonites have sought to be faithful disciples of Jesus, but as Mennonites have faced new challenges, their understandings of what discipleship means and how it is to be practiced have changed. While the core commitment to being a disciple of Jesus has not changed, how discipleship is interpreted, lived, and practiced has changed with changes in time and place. Mennonite churches in North America are in a context different from that of sixteenth-century Europe and from that of the first wave of Mennonite emigration to North America. For this reason, our theology has changed across generations and geography. And it needs to continue to change as we seek theological perspectives that resonate with the new reality of a church that has become more global and more diverse than ever.

Global multicultural and intercultural theological frameworks: A crucial difference

How should our theology change for this time and place? Since Anabaptist-Mennonite reality has become global, our theological framework has to become global too. But in my view, we need to distinguish between two kinds of global theological framework: a global multicultural framework and a global intercultural framework. According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, the word *multicultural* is defined as “designating or pertaining to a society consisting of many culturally distinct groups,” and *intercultural* means “taking place between cultures; belonging to or derived from different cultures.” A multicultural community would be one that acknowledges the existence of different cultural groups in its midst and tries to learn how to tolerate the differences in order to coexist. It acknowledges the differences and celebrates them but does not foster genuine interaction among them. In contrast, in an intercultural community there is a genuine engagement among cultures, and each culture influences the others, with the result that there is mutual transformation. This mutual transformation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process.

4 LeRon Shults, *Christology and Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.

In a context where Anabaptist-Mennonite faith has become a global reality, we cannot deny the diversity that exists in our global church. But faced with this reality, we can choose between these two patterns of engagement among people of different cultural groups. We can opt for the multicultural approach: we can acknowledge and celebrate differences. The method leads us to tolerate one another but limits our interaction with others; our differences remain too great to allow genuine engagement. In this approach, the key concept is tolerance. The second option is to move toward the intercultural approach, to engage deeply, with an attitude that our perspective is limited and we can learn from others. For this approach, mutuality is the key.

In my view, it is not enough to adopt a global multicultural theological framework, because this approach does not aspire to deep engagement. A global multicultural theological framework acknowledges various theologies that exist globally: liberation theologies, Minjung theologies,

We can opt for the multicultural approach, acknowledging and celebrating differences. This approach leads us to tolerate one another but limits our interaction. Or we can move toward the intercultural approach, engaging deeply. Here mutuality is key.

Dalit theologies, postcolonial theologies, and more. While recognizing these diverse theological views, a multicultural theological framework still focuses mostly on one's own traditional perspective. Most of the North American theological work being done by Mennonites is by Euro-American scholars, and they are mostly males. While this theological framework does not exclude theological perspectives from the Global South per se, it holds on to a belief that theologies originating in North America and in Europe are the most authoritative and advanced. And the theological engagement that does exist is designed to encourage

Anabaptist-Mennonite brothers and sisters in the Global South to contextualize theologies from the Global North into their own context. Where this kind of engagement moves in both directions, it is an authentically intercultural theological endeavor. But in fact this contextualizing often happens just in the Global South, and the theologies that are being contextualized are Western- and male-centric.

The problem with a global multicultural theological framework is not that it is unaware of diverse theological views but rather that it does not

engage other theological perspectives deeply, from within their own traditions and circles. Where a kind of engagement is present, it is often a matter of exporting Western theologies to the Global South and teaching how Western theological works are relevant and applicable to those regions. Where theologies from the Global South are valued and respected, they are often seen as contextual theologies, and Western theologies are seen as universal. Western theologians would no longer explicitly articulate this perspective, but as a person from the Global South who has been studying in Western theological seminaries for ten years, I would say that implicitly this view predominates in some Western seminaries.⁵ While Western theological institutions are becoming more and more diverse, Western theologians still do not engage enough with theologies originating outside Western cultures and even with the diverse theological perspectives that exist in their own contexts, including Aboriginal theologies, feminist theologies, black theologies, Latina/o theologies.

Toward a global and intercultural theological framework

For all the reasons I have just stated, I am arguing for the adoption of a global intercultural Mennonite theological framework. Where one is situated will affect how this theological framework looks. For readers in North America and Europe, it will not only encourage the acknowledgment of diverse theological perspectives but also engage other perspectives in ways that lead to re-examination of our theological understandings and to integration of insights from the Global South. North American theologians have long expected our brothers and sisters in the Global South to contextualize Western theologies; now there should be efforts among Western theologians to contextualize theologies from the Global South, to see how Mennonite theology can be expressed differently.

Viewed from the position of the Global South, this intercultural framework may look like an act of resistance. Because many theologians

5 Kwok Pui-lan, an Asian feminist scholar, reviewed syllabi of twelve courses in theology uploaded to the website of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The majority of the required books were written by European and Euro-American male theologians. Only one (and often none) of the required texts was by a theologian outside North America. See Kwok Pui-lan, "Teaching Theology from a Global Perspective," in *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis*, edited by Kwok Pui-lan, Cecilia González-Andrieu, and Dwight N. Hopkins (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2015), 15. This is the main point William Dyrness and Oscar Garcia-Johnson make in *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

in the Global South were educated in Western countries, they may default to a full embrace of Western theologies. Even those who were educated in their own countries are likely to have been formed in schools that adopted Western theological education. Theologians from the Global South need to resist uncritically accepting Western perspectives and become intentional about doing theology that is rooted in their particular experiences and sources.

Concrete practices for creating a global intercultural theological framework

How can people of Anabaptist-Mennonite persuasion in North America work concretely toward creating a global intercultural theological framework? Several concrete steps can get this process started.

Increase awareness that our theology is profoundly contextual.

An essential first step is to foster awareness in ourselves that our theolog-

A global intercultural Mennonite theological framework would not only acknowledge diverse theological perspectives but also engage other perspectives in ways that lead to re-examination of our theological understandings and to integration of insights from the Global South.

ical perspective is deeply contextual and therefore limited. Our understanding of faith and tradition and our interpretation of Scripture are profoundly contextual. The more aware we are of how contextual our theology is, the more we will be open to listening to and engaging with the theological perspectives of people coming from a different context. In contrast, the more we assume that our theology is universal, the more we will disregard theological voices from other parts of the world and focus only on our theological perspective. As Mennonites, we need to acknowledge that one of the limitations of much of our theological discourse is its Western- and male-

centric character. We need to maintain some continuity with Mennonite history and tradition, but in a context in which the Mennonite church has become a global church, we must also acknowledge that our perspective is limited and provide ample space for voices from the Global South.

Support people from the Global South in their reinterpretation of sources of our theology. A second step is to encourage Mennonites from the Global South in reinterpreting the sources of our theologies.

A number of Anabaptist-Mennonite scholars have studied the work of sixteenth-century Anabaptist leaders in order to explain Anabaptist-Mennonite theologies and practices. These are important theological tasks, but most if not all of the people who have examined these sources and interpreted them are white men. The sources are not self-explanatory; someone has to do the work of interpreting them, a process that always is informed by the social location and intellectual outlook of the person doing the interpreting.

There would of course be other ways of interpreting the sources, informed by other social locations and intellectual perspectives. It is time for Anabaptist-Mennonite historians from the Global South to engage in interpreting these sources. Imagine how the early Anabaptist movement could be understood in a deeper, more diverse, and broader sense, if sisters and brothers from the Global South were to interpret them using their own lenses! And they could do this work of reinterpretation not only with sixteenth-century sources but also with the works of contemporary Mennonite theologians. When theologians of the Global South do this work, and theologians of the Global North listen to what they have to say, I am confident that the result will be enriching for Anabaptist-Mennonite theology.

Reach out to new dialogue partners. A third step we need is to engage with new partners in theological dialogue, reflecting other contexts. If we have been reading mostly theologians from the Western world, we need to start reading the work of theologians from other cultures and theologians within our context who have been disregarded. There are Christian theologians from the Global South and theologians in North America whose work is not often read. A few of many such theologians are Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Kwok Pui-lan, Rita Nakashima Brock, Andrew Sung Park, Peter C. Phan, Kosuke Koyama, R. S. Sugirtharajah, Kwame Bediako, Musa W. Dube, Emmanuel Katongole, John S. Mbiti, and George E. Tinker. The more we expose ourselves to theological voices from other contexts, the more we will be able to theologize interculturally. Wilbert Shenk once said, “We can say theologically that the full meaning of the Body of Christ will be known only through the rich insights that each member of the Body can contribute.”⁶ In other words, as we listen

6 Wilbert Shenk, “The Intercultural Learning Process as a New Model of Mission,” in *Towards an Intercultural Theology: Essays in Honor of J. A. B. Jongeneel*, edited by Martha Frederiks, Meindert Dijkstra, and Anton Houtepen (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 87.

to and converse with its varied members, we will get to know the body of Christ more fully. Expanding the range of our partnership in theological dialogue is crucial for understanding and knowing Christ.

Name and value theological differences. A fourth practice is to engage with global theological themes. Because all theologies are contextual, they are all in danger of becoming provincial and excluding other theologies. When that happens, connections with the global church are lost. In order to avoid this outcome, theologian and missiologist Robert Schreiter encourages each theology to make connections with these global theological themes: liberation, feminism, ecology, and human rights. These themes are currently being widely discussed by theologians around

Mennonites in the Global South can contribute their particular perspective on peace and reconciliation and further develop the gospel of peace.

the world.⁷ Here I would like to add another theme that is being discussed globally: peace/reconciliation. Focusing on peace/reconciliation, but not being limited to it, we as a global church can bring different understandings to this theme and thus expand our understanding of it. Not all Anabaptist-Mennonites in the world have done extensive constructive work on peace theology, as European

and Euro-American Anabaptist-Mennonites have. But Mennonites in the Global South can contribute their particular perspective on peace and reconciliation and further develop the gospel of peace. For example, for Chinese and Korean people, the idea of peace contains the implicit meaning that it comes as a result of rice being given fairly to all people. The South African concept of Ubuntu can contribute a new perspective on peace. This kind of engagement and constructive dialogue can lead to a more global and intercultural Mennonite theology.

What if we had only one Gospel in the New Testament? Probably we would have less discussion about Jesus, because we would have less biblical material about him to deal with. Since we have four Gospels, scholars and nonscholars alike debate which of them offers a more accurate portrayal of his life and teaching. The multiplicity of perspectives makes it difficult to isolate a single clear-cut and accurate picture of Jesus and his teaching. But although some might see the fact of different Gospels as a

7 Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 15–16.

problem, to others it is a blessing. No one person and no single story can adequately convey everything about the life of Jesus and his teaching. The more stories of Jesus we have, the more diverse views of Jesus will exist, with the paradoxical result that we can know Jesus better.

In the same way, as the Mennonite church becomes more global, it is becoming much more complicated and diverse. In consequence, different theological views of Mennonite faith, practice, and theology will develop. One day, on the list of Mennonite food there will be kimchi and asado. One day, among the most used Mennonite last names there will be Kim Sun and González. The Mennonite game will not be limited to making connections among people in Europe and North America. This future is not that far from the present day, and this reality is bringing changes in Mennonite communities and theologies. Since this will be the future of the global Mennonite church, we Mennonites in North America must work toward a more global intercultural theological framework. It is not an easy task, but it is an essential one.

And if we Mennonites from the Global North have been doing most of the talking and leading most of the discussion, we should now provide more opportunity and space for Anabaptist-Mennonites from the Global South to speak and lead. This does not mean that we will or should agree with everything they say, but we at least need to listen carefully and with genuine curiosity, until they feel that they have been given ample opportunity to offer their perspectives. Then we should engage in a constructive dialogue. Through this intercultural dialogue, our theology, our church, and our life will be enriched. This dialogue will help us discern how to follow Jesus together with brothers and sisters from different cultural backgrounds. We will no longer follow white European Jesus but Jesus who is all and in all.

About the author

Hyung Jin Kim Sun is a Korean-Paraguayan Mennonite in the third year of a doctoral program in theological ethics at Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology. His primary research interests are Mennonite ecclesiology and praxis, becoming intercultural and decolonializing communities, and public witnessing in post-secular and multicultural society. He works as the administrative assistant at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and also serves as an instructor with the Anabaptist Learning Workshop, a program offered by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada in cooperation with Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

Blessed and challenged as partners in Christ

A United States and a Beninese perspective

In 2003, Waterford Mennonite Church (WMC) entered into a formal partnership with Benin Bible Institute (BBI), located in Cotonou, Benin. We are now in the fifteenth year of this partnership, which involves regular exchanges of people and prayers, and significant financial support from Waterford.

Neil Amstutz

I arrived as new pastoral team leader in the second partnership year, but already it was on strong footing.

My predecessor in my Waterford pastoral role, Joe Miller, was gracious enough to share some of his reflections about the beginnings of the partnership. He wrote:

1. *We didn't create this possibility. It was a gift of the Holy Spirit using existing relationships. God was at work long before we thought of this possibility. Our part was recognizing and exploring the potential.*
2. *As a congregation we were committed to not doing a partnership on our own. We very much wanted Mennonite Mission Network to walk with us and to serve as a counselor and mentor. We also agreed with MMN and BBI that MMN would address the financial support we offered as a congregation. That kept MMN as a place to ask hard questions about money.*
3. *Along with the leaders of BBI, we acknowledged the imbalance of financial resources. Together we agreed that Waterford would cover most of the costs, but we also agreed to keep attentive to not allowing this to take away the true partnership.*
4. *We also knew our African partners were wealthy spiritually and we North Americans were in need of them sharing*

their spiritual wealth. Of the two, we recognized that we were the poorer partner!

For fifteen years now, we have had the pleasure of hosting thirteen men and three women from Benin—BBI graduates, faculty, administrators, and board members. In the fall of 2018, three more guests will strengthen the

From these guest and host encounters, unforgettable relationships have developed with Beninese church leaders. They have left with us indelible impressions that are greater than any theological lessons we have learned from them.

partnership with us by coming to Goshen. At least thirty Waterford people have also had the chance to visit BBI in person. What follows is a brief attempt to summarize some blessings and some challenges our congregation has experienced through this partnership.

What blessings has this global partnership provided for Waterford?

First are some general blessings related to broader awareness of the global church. The BBI partnership has put the small country of Benin on the map for Waterford attenders. Because all the BBI constituent churches are evangelical,

and none of them are Mennonite, the partnership has increased our awareness of and appreciation for some global church bodies that are not Mennonite. In addition, the regular cycle of delegations coming from and going to Benin disrupts our North American assumption that the church as we know it really is *the church*.

Other blessings are particular to our congregation and to BBI and the Beninese context. The experience of people praying together aloud simultaneously and enthusiastically has made us more expressive in our oral prayers, or at least given us a greater tolerance for such expressiveness. We have also been blessed with the gift of greater openness to the language of spiritual powers and spiritual warfare. Another blessing has come through being challenged to greater dependence on the Holy Spirit, and to live less by the clock. And new biblical insights have come in seeing texts through the eyes of African sisters and brothers.

More and more people within the congregation have personal BBI connections. Some have visited Benin, and others have been lodging or meal hosts here in the United States. From these guest and host encounters, unforgettable relationships have developed with Beninese church leaders. They have left with us indelible impressions that are greater than

any theological lessons we have learned from them. Sometimes there have been unexpected missional serendipities as one set of experiences has an unforeseen impact on another. Our congregation also supports the work of Jerrell and Jane Ross Richer with Indigenous Christians through MMN in Ecuador. Because of that relationship, we began to explore the possibility of connecting established Beninese Christians with struggling Indigenous Ecuadorian believers, for some South-to-South resourcing.

With blessings in global partnerships also come challenges. Over time, questions arise out of in-house competition for resources, including money and energy. People wonder what our investment in this partnership is really “buying” us. They ask, What else could we be doing for God’s

With blessings in global partnerships also come challenges. Over time, questions arise out of in-house competition for resources, including money and energy. Also over time, we may be lulled into what I call a global awareness complacency.

kingdom with all that money? Also, over time we may be lulled into what I call a global awareness complacency: we feel good, perhaps even a bit smug, about our congregation’s global engagement, and we risk having our responsiveness and our openness to transformation replaced by a sense of self-righteous sufficiency about our level of global awareness. Alternatively, our global awareness can morph into paralyzing guilt about our many privileges in the world.

Language barriers are not easily overcome when the lingua franca of the partner’s country is not widely spoken

in our own congregation or locality. Long-term sustainability can also be a challenge, particularly when the experiences, giftedness, and language skills of one or two persons among us become central. We also face temptations related to hidden forms of racism and/or colonialism: We may cut corners in our communication patterns with our partners, for the sake of supposed efficiency. Or we may fail to test assumptions we make, in decisions that will affect partners. We may attach new conditions or expectations to new donations. And we may fail to see instances of our own limitations and neediness, and fail to ask for counsel from our partners.

A good problem to have in the long term is the challenge related to knowing when and how far to push boundaries of mutuality with partners. For example, when do we simply receive gratefully the reports of our partners’ strategic visioning processes, and when do we humbly suggest

possible blind spots in those processes, which we hope we have earned the right to name, in Christian love? In a complex world of diverse support networks and funding sources, how do we navigate our relationship? How do we avoid making our international partners curry favor with other partner congregations and nongovernmental organizations?

Bruno Gansa

Our partnership with Waterford Mennonite Church helps us to have a truly excellent curriculum at Benin Bible Institute.¹

Seeing how Christian faith is lived out in another context gives us an expanded knowledge of the Bible. The Bible tells us that without knowledge we cannot please God. In addition to knowledge, we learn practical aspects of how to live our Christian life. We learn principles of how to lead our churches more effectively. Rather than seeing disagreements as something undesirable, we learn how to manage conflicts and how to grow stronger and more Christ-like *because of* dissent in our congregations.

For those of us who are married, we learn how to better relate to our spouses. Those who are not yet married learn what to look for in a partner that will help them to live together as a team really able to do God's will.

What is really special about Benin Bible Institute is that we go beyond just training evangelists and pastors. With our agro-pastoral program we offer an education that prepares people for all aspects of life.² This program teaches our church leaders ways to feed their families and to be more self-sufficient. We expand the resources available to our pastors. We no longer have problems without solutions. Together, we find solutions to our problems.

The partnership with Waterford broadens our horizons with ideas about new ways that congregations can bless their members. Because we collaborate with Waterford, we learn new ways of collaborating among different denominations here in Benin.

On a personal level, my visit to Waterford church showed me what love in action looks like. I learned new ways to show Jesus's love to other people. In the United States, I learned how to lessen the boundaries built between social classes. I re-examined many of our taboos, such as ones

1 Visit the Institut Biblique du Bénin website at <https://institutbb.wordpress.com/>.

2 Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, "Tending Mind, Body and Spirit," Mennonite Mission Network, February 25, 2015, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://www.mennonitemission.net/blog/>.

about who can eat with whom. In the United States, the lines aren't so distinct between rich and poor. This is what the gospel teaches us, but I had to see it concretely before I could understand it.

Living in the homes of Waterford members, I also learned about how God wants me to live with my wife. I saw how husbands and wives help each other. Jesus's love also breaks down the distinct lines between husbands and wives.

Even rich people in America work with their hands. I was so impressed with people's gardens where they grow their own fruits and vegetables. When I came home, I planted vegetables in my flower beds. My wife and I enjoy talking together in the evening when we water our plants.

Even the rich people in America work with their hands. I was so impressed with people's gardens where they grow their own fruits and vegetables. When I came home, I planted vegetables in my flower beds. Now my wife and I enjoy talking together in the evenings when we water our plants.

Because of this partnership, we have people in the United States praying for us every day.

Over the years, this partnership grows deeper and more meaningful. No one is labeled "giver" or "receiver." We

all give and receive. This partnership gives us so much and helps us live for Christ. I want to start a club of all the Benin Bible Institute people who have had the opportunity to travel to Waterford, so that we can keep reminding each other of what we learned through the partnership and find ways to implement that in our churches here in Benin. This partnership helps us progress further in God's will.

About the authors

Neil B. Amstutz is pastoral team leader at Waterford Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, which since 2003 has had a formal partnership with Benin Bible Institute, arranged through Mennonite Mission Network. This partnership includes mutual exchanges of people in the USA and Benin, in alternating years. Neil was in Benin on one of these visits in 2006. Bruno O. Gansa is a retired public school inspector and served on the BBI board of directors when he visited Waterford in 2013 as part of a BBI delegation. He wrote these reflections (translated by Lynda Hollinger-Janzen) a year after his visit to the United States. Gansa's reflections were first published by Mennonite Mission Network on August 13, 2014.



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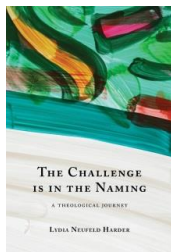
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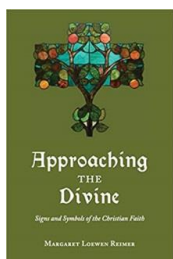


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