

MWC Reflects Rich Diversity of Anabaptist Witness

I arrived at Harrisburg 2015 at the end of my two-year term in Ecuador as a mission worker, traveling straight to Pennsylvania before going to my home area. This meant enjoying the event with other colleagues or leaders I worked with in Ecuador (Ecuadorian, Chilean, Colombian, and US American), as I transition to life back in the United States. When we led a workshop entitled "Serving Refugees in Ecuador," about the ministry of the Quito Mennonite Church, it certainly didn't feel like I was leaving direct involvement in that work.

As my first experience of Mennonite World Conference I did not know what to expect or whom I might be able to see. In spite of more than 7500 attendees, it was relatively easy to run into folks. I felt blessed to be in a place where I could both see old friends and meet new friends from so many parts of the world. It was extraordinary to be able to see familiar faces from home, college, seminary, Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia, and Ecuador all in one place. The conference did well at giving one a taste of the multicultural flavor of Anabaptist followers of Christ.

This was especially true of the music during the assembly sessions, which represented styles from the continents represented. All continents offered memorable songs, though the music from Africa provided particularly contagious rhythm and spirit inside the arena filled with Anabaptists.

The event certainly served to strengthen relational ties between sisters and brothers from around the world. It also emboldens delegates from around the world to encourage their congregations to claim an Anabaptist identity. Yet what an Anabaptist identity means in each corner of the globe is not a simple question. Anabaptists come from numerous cultures, have differing experiences of violence in their communities, and have differing economic realities and ways of relating to the natural world.

Faithful proclamation and incarnation of the gospel will look different in different contexts. Yet the variety of speakers and workshops demonstrates that, beyond contextual differences, Anabaptist communities embrace many different theologies, including different beliefs about salvation. I also heard affirmation of a holistic gospel from several speakers, a gospel that incarnates the love of Christ, addressing all aspects of human well being in this life.

Another question is how to respond to the tremendous social inequality between Anabaptists of different parts of the world, which simply reflects the social inequality of the world itself. I appreciated the public time of confession with which Kevin Ressler concluded his speech. This reminded me of our worship services in the congregations of Quito, where we have a time of silent confession and a time of spoken community confession. Kevin comes from Swiss-German as well as Suba and Luo (Tanzanian) background, but Kevin's own public confession invited fellow US Americans to repent of the ways we have not examined our privilege and our usage of wealth. As a citizen of the host country, I feel shame at how many people my government excluded from this event because it would not grant visas, including twenty-five members of a thirty-person choir.

Anabaptist Witness

Anabaptist Witness is a global Anabaptist and Mennonite dialogue on key issues facing the church in mission.
<http://www.anabaptistwitness.org>

Our global Anabaptist witness must respond to an economic system that continues to produce disparity and environmental exploitation. We also live in a post-colonial world that still bears the marks of past western imperialism and racism. The challenge is to have an Anabaptist witness where all voices speaking from faithful Christian praxis are heard, regardless of race, country, social status, sex, or sexual orientation. These voices help us to see who the marginalized are in a particular context, those in whom we will find the presence of Christ.

Young Anabaptist Tigist Tesfaye Galagle from Ethiopia reflected on her journey toward claiming Anabaptist faith in the midst of doubt, at times wondering if it was simply the faith of white colonizers. Hippolyto Tshimanga recognized the reasons for calling for a moratorium on western mission in light of the western church's complicity in colonial legacies, yet insisted that mission belongs to all churches. To be the church is to be in mission.

I hope all participants will be inspired toward the mission of proclaiming the love of Christ by living out the love of Christ in our respective communities. I imagine this will take as many forms as there are styles of music, so long as it is not built on the supposed superiority of any one group of human beings. This mission is for near and for far, and embraces the full experience and integrity of each human being. None is too small to count for God's reign. As one of our songs eloquently states, "No journey too far, no distance too great...no creature too humble, no child too small for God to be seeking and find."¹

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1. Colin Gibson, "Nothing is lost on the breath of God," Hope Publishing Company, 1996.