

# The Mission of God and Global Relationships

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Even now I can clearly remember the nighttime moment in the Kasai-Oriental province of Zaire, lying on my back on the ground under a huge star-filled sky in the middle of a group of Zairian women friends and thinking to myself—this is it. This is exactly what I have always dreamed of. I wrote to our families about that experience in April 1993. We'd been living in Zaire with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for four years by that time.

I got asked to preach April 2 at the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite Women's Meeting. Dan and the boys dropped me off by motorcycle at Mamu Kabedi's house at 1:30 in the afternoon. We finally started walking by 3:00. In the meantime, she fed us (the three women waiting for her to get herself together) beignets and peanuts. She laughed at my impatience to get going. She said this is the perfect time in my life (between babies) to be running around with the women. No nursing baby to make me rush home, no little baby to carry along . . . we had all the time in the world! After we finally got walking (on our 18-kilometer hike out to a village) we stopped at two other women's homes to wait for them to get going too. Both fed us again—one, peanuts, and the other came dashing out of her house holding the bowls of food, praying over it as she ran so we could eat fast and go.

We ended up being a group of eleven women. When we had to go past the rude and crude diamond diggers at the Mbuji-Mayi River, the women surrounded me to hide me in the middle of the group and started singing one of the walking songs really loudly. Otherwise, people can be really rude. We sang most of the walk, and even the middle-aged ones jogged up the hills in time to the music. We finally got out to the village at 8:15 p.m.

There were 111 women camped out under the stars beside a tiny palm-branch-shelter church. They swept the ground smooth—no grass for snakes. This was a group of women from eight subregions of the Commu-

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nauté Evangélique Mennonite. The next Sunday, I heard a woman stand up in church and praise God that it didn't rain on our campout. She's right. There weren't even enough houses in that village to put 111 women.

I looked around for an empty space to put down my pagne and go to sleep—it was almost 9:00 p.m. I'd just lain down when Mamu Bisosa came over and said, "What? We're just ready to start our worship service. Come on!" So we had a complete service with a sermon on Jesus telling his disciples to go get the donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem. Mamu Dalamba had an interesting twist. She said over and over that we need to be untied (like the donkey). Why? Because the Master has need of us. She repeated over and over, "What's tying you down when the Master has need of you?"

Finally, I went to lie down again. This time Mamu Ngalula (from the Lukelenge group) brought me a mat to sleep on. I had been on a pagne by myself, but Mamu Kabedi and Mamu Mujinga said I couldn't sleep all by myself; it was too cold! So we spent the night with three women and a baby on a space no bigger than 4 feet wide. But I'm getting ahead of my story. We had just lain down when they woke us back up to eat nshima at 10:30 p.m. THEN we got to sleep.

Up at 5:00 a.m. to sing and pray again. Bucket baths one at a time for everyone. We started our church service by 9:00 a.m. with even more women arriving on foot that morning. I preached on Romans 8:35, and around there. It went pretty well, but the "Amen speaker" redirected my point and probably improved on it.

I ended up being sick for two weeks after drinking Lubilangi River water during that women's event. It was worth it. I am incredibly grateful to have lived that experience with those women at a time in my life when I "had all the time in the world."

The story of God's mission and global relationships has been an ongoing theme in my life. Dan and I served with MCC in assignments in DR Congo, Nigeria, Indonesia, and then in Thailand as Area Directors for Southeast Asia from 1989 until 2017 with the exception of a four-year stretch for graduate school and living near family. My parents served with MCC in Indonesia before my birth. I grew up on their stories and pictures from their time on the island of Timor serving as "Fraternal Workers" under the Indonesian leadership of the Gereja Masehi Injili Timor—the Evangelical Church of Timor. I've spent some time over the past years transcribing my mother's weekly letters from Timor and comparing them with my own letters written thirty years later during our first term in Zaire—both of us as young women in our twenties experiencing the world church for the first time. As young people, my parents had served in an assignment location several islands away from their in-country

MCC leaders, with whom they communicated only via telegrams and infrequent letters.

As I grew up, I always heard my parents talk about these Timorese church leaders with respect. That is intriguing to me, because I can tell from the letters I've transcribed that my parents' respect for local church leadership grew after they left Timor and gained more distance and life experience. The way my parents had reframed their stories and recounted them to my brother and me as children differed from the sometimes raw rants my mother wrote as she lived those experiences.

I know now that when my parents went to Timor in 1959, the model of Fraternal Workers—foreign workers who served as guests of the local church—was a rather new concept. This model formed my expectation for interactions in the world church. Those were the stories I heard as I grew up.

Young North Americans have much to learn from older faith leaders of other cultures. I found this next little paragraph in my mother's letter written on April 1, 1960, in Kupang, Timor, Indonesia. At age 26 she wrote, "Monday and Tuesday were Muslim holidays. Here they celebrate like New Years and Christmas by visiting. On Tuesday evening, Glenn and I went with Abineno to visit the head of the veterinarian service and the head of the Military, who are both Muslims. They had gobs of visitors. We have cake and pop and visit a while. The purpose is to show respect, mostly."

That snippet of a letter holds a wealth of information. My parents' supervisor in the Evangelical Church of Timor was J. L. Abineno. When my family served in Indonesia with MCC forty years after my parents' MCC term, I learned that Abineno was an important Reformed theologian, author, and church leader not only in Timor but also across Indonesia. In 1960, my parents were young rural Ohio Mennonites in their first year of intercultural experience. It is amazing to me that Abineno invited them to make these important Idul Fitri visits along with him. I can imagine that it never would have occurred to my young parents to visit either military people or Muslims to mark a major Muslim holiday if they had been making their own plans that day. In the letter, I can hear my mother echoing to her Ohio parents the explanation that Abineno must have given to her about the purpose of their visits. "It's to show respect." Abineno, an Indonesian pastor and leader, encouraged my parents to reach beyond their boundaries that day. He held an important place in shaping my parents' development as lifelong connectors, which, in turn, shaped me and many other people.

As longterm MCC workers, we've had an unusual opportunity to live among world churches. We've led MCC teams working alongside the church in relief, development, and peace. We have always been active in local congregations, but we've never been leaders or pastors or advisors or church planters or organizers or elders. We have preached very rarely. We've been a part of choirs,

women's fellowship, baby dedications, home Bible study fellowships, baptisms, weddings, funerals, conflicts, communion, miscarriages, scandals, footwashing, parties, wife searches, contests, and hospital visits with our Dipumba Plain congregation in Zaire; our Anglo Jos congregation in Nigeria; our Siloam congregation in Indonesia; and our Payap congregation in Thailand. In these congregations, we have always found people who have given us counsel and who have included us.

We've had opportunities to serve at higher levels of MCC leadership, but we've never served from either of MCC's geographic centers in the United States or Canada. Because none of our experience has been in North American offices, we've had the rare opportunity to have been participant observers, shaped by almost twenty-five years of hearing the interpretation of scripture and current events and history from the point of view of world church contexts.

### Vision of the World Church

Imagine how this passage from Ephesians 4:3–6,11–16 (NIV) would sound if you were sitting in the midst of a whole stadium filled with members of Mennonite World Conference from countries around the world. How does this passage sound if we imagine the body of Christ in a global context?

<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;<sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When we imagine the body of Christ as something global, we no longer think of the world as “us” and “them” but rather as “WE.” We cannot fall back on colonial assumptions that God's gifts of leadership emanate from “us” in our particular geographic location; God's gifts spread across the whole body. From Christ, the global communion “joined and held together by every supporting

ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” I can imagine our various conferences, churches, and agencies around the world as the supporting ligaments that join and hold together the body of the worldwide church as we participate in God’s mission.

I see Mennonite World Conference (MWC) as a faithful yet imperfect attempt to knit together fluid combinations of Anabaptists around the globe. Have you ever played the icebreaker game in which participants stand in a circle to toss a ball of yarn back and forth as they get to know names or answer questions? A person holds on to the yarn and answers a question and then keeps hold of a strand while throwing the ball of yarn to the next person. By the end of the game, the group is woven together by such a complex web of yarn that it would be difficult to untangle. That game illustrates for me the hope I have for God’s mission and global relationships. The shape of the game is a circle in which all participants are facing toward each other. The circle can expand to include a growing number of participants. No one sits in a second row, takes a back seat, or holds sole leadership. In the circle, there is no hub, but there is a clear central core of the shared space in the middle. The layers of yarn are a bit messy and can get tangled. Even if one participant loses her grip on the yarn, the web still holds until she can grab hold again. Of course, all analogies break down, but I like the image.

### **Attempting to Embody the Body of Christ**

How does our perspective change if we consider God’s ongoing mission of reconciliation broadly through the “WE” of the world church rather than specifically through our individual agencies? When we think of God’s mission in the world, many agencies based in the West think of working in partnerships. I imagine that the partnership concept originated in the West because it is a business and legal model that makes sense in cultures that appreciate formality and linear thinking. We even translate *koinonia* as “partnership.” Other cultures may have more fluid forms of collaboration and think of *koinonia* a bit differently in terms of “communion” or “fellowship.”

I find it interesting that even though the scriptures call for unity across the church, when we talk about God’s mission and the world church, we almost always talk about separate identities coming together in partnership. We more often think of “us” and “them” in mission partnerships than WE. We use pairs of words to describe a two-sided stakeholders’ partnership relationship to each other. These pairs often imply a power differential between the two groups. We may talk about senders and receivers, donors and beneficiaries, uppers and lowers, guests and hosts, missionaries and national church leaders, funders and recipients, developed and developing, helpers and helpees, First World and Two-third Worlds, the home church and the mission church, the Global North and the Global South.

Many of the words used to describe intercultural work imply a power imbalance: to disciple, to empower, to grow, to develop, to equip, or to build capacity. The words often have a connotation of one party being actively engaged and one party being acted upon. In these words, we can hear fairly clearly who knows and who does not know. These words, layered on top of our Western legacy of colonialism, can be dangerous. In the Ephesians passage, we hear “we” language rather than “us” and “them” language. We hear a shared calling to participate in God’s mission to build up the body of Christ. In this passage, we hear about a distribution of gifts and a fluid flow of giving and receiving from ever-changing directions within a unified body.

As we work interculturally within the world church, we need to recognize our differences. Within the unity of our fellowship, we differ in important ways. As we work together as the body of Christ, we will often find ourselves in the geographic or cultural space of another part of the body. To describe these differences, I think one pair of words can be helpful: the members of the world church fluidly change to become either Insiders or Outsiders depending on the situation. I like these terms better than the other pairs I previously mentioned, because no one gets permanently stuck with just one label. When an action takes place in your geographic location and in your cultural context, you are an Insider. As an Insider, you are an expert in that place. Alternatively, when you participate in action that takes place in the geographic location of someone else and outside of your cultural context, you are an Outsider. As an Outsider, you are a learner and a guest in that place. Our roles and perspectives can shift depending on where we are in the world and what we are doing. Even though an Outsider can learn and appreciate many things about a different context, the Outsider will rarely become fully an Insider in that context. For example, when MCC works with the Muria Church in Java, Indonesia, MCC workers who are American, Canadian, Zambian, or Indian are Outsiders. Members of the Muria Church are Insiders. When the Muria Church based in Java partners with MCC to work on the island of Papua, then both the Muria Church and MCC are Outsiders. Church members in Papua are Insiders.

The only place where everyone sheds the Outsider label and where we can all become Insiders is when we come together to create something that is new for all of us and where all of us participate equally in its creation. When MWC meets in gathered assemblies, we are all Insiders because we are doing something new together that is not tied to a specific geographic location. My hope is that we grow in our recognition of the body of Christ and of our need to move forward together as we participate in God’s mission.

### **Stories of Partnerships: Creating Our Own Partner**

As we talk about the mission of God and global partnerships, I’d like to focus on the kind of partnerships that bring together Insiders in collaborative rela-

tionships with Outsiders. My first story is about the time when MCC Zaire tried to create its own partners.

### *MCC Zaire: Katanda*

When Dan and I started with MCC in 1989, the organization had entered deeply into the philosophy that partnership was much preferred over direct implementation as the way to interact with the church outside of North America. Everyone talked about the problem of “dependency” and cringed when we heard parent/child metaphors. Without really understanding mission history at the time, I remember my sense of judgment and impatience as I blamed Zairian church leaders who, in their requests for funds, talked about the Zairian church as a child abandoned by her parents. As I look back, I think we had a feeling that it was our responsibility as MCC to force a child church to grow up. In Zaire in 1989, Outsiders from Mennonite agencies were migrating away from mission station assignments and moving toward living in the communities where Mennonite Insiders lived. As we understood it at that time, the Outsiders’ goal was for the Insider church to be able to be sustainable and not dependent on outside resources to maintain all of the infrastructure built up by earlier mission efforts.

In an attempt at a new model, MCC assigned Dan and me—25-year-old inexperienced community development workers—to serve with the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite (CEM) in Kasai-Oriental in Zaire. The CEM had parted ways from the Communauté Mennonite au Zaire some thirty years before during a time of ethnic conflict. This denomination had not had any Outsider workers for the thirty years since that denominational split.

The CEM leaders decided that Dan and I and our baby, Ben, would live in the village of Katanda. We would work together with a CEM counterpart, who would also start a CEM church in Katanda. Kolela Shambuyi, a CEM pastor in his early thirties, also moved to Katanda at that time together with his family. His wife, Muambuyi, was our age, and they had five children. Our two families lived across the path from each other in mudbrick, thatched houses. We grew to know each other very well, and our families were back and forth every day.

In 1989, the philosophical importance of working in partnership was so strong that MCC Zaire sometimes helped the church create our own partners in order to have an entity to partner with. Our assignment was to help the church of CEM Insiders start their own development office together with Pastor Kolela and another pastor, Mbuyi. Dan and I had our living support from MCC. Pastor Kolela and Pastor Mbuyi had a promise of living support from the church as the CEM’s part of the partnership, but in those very hard times, they never received support. The CEM denomination had very few financial resources and almost no infrastructure because of an earlier conflict. The only

thing we had together to start a development office was an acronym and four of us as human resources. MCC committed to fund projects but not any operating costs. This was seen as tough love for the CEM and helping them to step up to the reciprocity of partnership. But the CEM had so much internal conflict, inflation was so astronomical, and there was so much political instability that the development office never developed past training two teams of oxen and two groups of farmers. We suspected that church leaders would not have prioritized a development office except that it was a way to get back into a funding relationship with North Americans. That early attempt at partnership was not effective in terms of development outcomes. We eventually reframed our experience positively in terms of the relationships and empathy developed and the life lessons learned during that time.

### *MCC Zaire: Mbuji-Mayi*

My second story of partnership between Outsiders and Insiders also comes from Zaire. By 1992, we had left the village of Katanda, together with Pastor Kolela and Muambuyi, because of a century-old interethnic land conflict that resurfaced violently. We moved to Mbuji-Mayi, an overgrown diamond mining camp city of over a million people. Although the concentration of population indicated a city, Mbuji-Mayi had no electricity, running water, postal system, or telephone and only a few crumbling paved roads. That year, the first of a half million internally displaced people started streaming into Mbuji-Mayi. They were Baluba people, fleeing from Shaba Province, where then-President Mobutu had been instigating a program of ethnic cleansing. Because Mobutu backed the violence, he wanted to keep it secret from the world. That was possible because Mbuji-Mayi was in a diamond mining zone and very few foreigners had permission to be there. The poor condition of the roads across the country meant that the airport became the heavily guarded port of entry from other parts of the country.

Because Dan and I and another couple from Africa InterMennonite Mission already had permits to live in the diamond mining zone, we joined with local Catholic and Protestant leaders in an ecumenical committee to try to receive and respond to these thousands of refugees. For the first months, we had very limited funds, and none of us had any experience in managing a crisis of that size with no resources.

After six months in which the rest of the world did not know what was happening, a few large humanitarian organizations received permission to enter Kasai-Oriental. Here is an excerpt from a letter I wrote to my parents on May 11, 1993, soon after Doctors without Borders arrived and when our Mbuji-Mayi ecumenical committee tried to partner with them. As you read my letter, look for the ways in which I imagine us all as Insiders doing some-

thing new together, and the times when I back away and consider myself as an Outsider. I was 28 when I wrote this:

The refugees are as stressful as ever. In one of my reflective moments, I narrowed my stresses down to six!

1. **Refugees' accusations.** Everyone assumes that our committee is "eating" all the aid funds.
2. **Government interference.** We had the Director of Social Affairs, a real Mobutu man, actually calling the refugees to pillage during a food distribution time. Our friend has been accused by the mayor of Mbuji-Mayi for saying that the governor stole two barrels of refugee fuel. (He did.) The governor is trying to force the president of our ecumenical committee to write a letter saying the churches have failed and that we want him to take over. The governor and his cronies go over to the refugee camp and tell the people, "Look how you are being mistreated!" Then on Saturday night, the Mbuji-Mayi refugee situation was on Zairian National Television (controlled by Mobutu). It showed the overcrowding and poor conditions and reported that it was the fault of the churches and their White missionaries.
3. **We are deflated to learn that the church committee we have been defending is not above reproach, either.** There is a lot of underhandedness going on. We feel like we have to be policemen, but it is too time consuming to be everywhere and oversee everything to make sure nothing is stolen. Even pastors are taking extra sacks of corn to feed people in their parish who no longer fit the criteria of those we are able to serve. They are able to justify it all to themselves because it truly is a real need. Yet they sneak it because they know it isn't kosher.
4. **The real needs of the refugees.** Sometimes we just want to walk out because too much is dumped on us and too much shady business is going on. But in the end, if things collapsed (and it feels like we're the ones holding things together) it would be the truly needy who would suffer.
5. **The police job dumped on us by Medecins Sans Frontiers and other donors.** A lot of donors say they are only giving to this local committee because we are there. That kind of holds us personally responsible for the money, and yet we are not the official administrators, so we can't make the policy and hard decisions. MSF has made Dan personally responsible for the fuel and me responsible for the medicines. These things were entrusted to

Dan and I individually and not to our committee.

6. **Guilt for not doing our regular work and keeping up with all our CEM contacts as we work with the larger church effort.**

Every time you are one place, you think of two other places you should be!

As I read my words now, I cringe at some of what I wrote. Our colonial legacy of privilege rather than our education or experience made us helpful to the ecumenical committee. The humanitarian agencies told us that they gave funds to the local committee because Dan and I were there. We felt we had to be policemen. Why did we assume we should have that power over church leaders twice our age? As White Outsiders from North America, we had access to networks that Insiders did not have. Because of our colonial privilege, we got permission to use the satellite phone of the government diamond mining company to make a call to MCC headquarters to tell what was happening and to try to get funding. Through church members working at the airport, we learned that Ofeibe Quist-Arcton of the *Guardian* was being held by airport immigration and would not be allowed to see any internally displaced people. Dan went late at night to the airport to give an interview because she wasn't allowed to leave the airport. But even that—why was the voice of a White man trusted more as a news source than the Zairian people living the reality as they hung around the airport? The story of Insiders working with Outsiders is often a story of colonial privilege—even when there are good intentions.

## Rationale for Partnership

Throughout history, mission has been used to carry out colonial agendas. Missionaries have been co-opted into expanding the reach of their citizenship country. At the very least, the way of Outsiders having access to work with Insiders has been smoothed by colonial power. Our passports carry power. Although church mission agencies highlight the kingdom of God rather than earthly nations, many features of mission mirror the themes of conquest, expansion, and colonization.

As we look back at our history and forward to new ways of working, we seek fresh opportunities for a different kind of relationship between various parts of the body of Christ with different identities, histories, nationalities, cultures, structures, and geographic locations. North American agencies give different rationales for a shift to global partnerships across the world church, often appealing to logic. Here are seven of the reasons I've heard over time. I'm sure you could add to my list.

1. **Demographics.** North American agencies might say, “We should shift to global partnerships across the world church because the face of the church is changing. Since there are now more Christians in the Global South than in other parts of the world, we should shift to a model of global partnerships in recognition of this new reality.” This logic assumes that only now, with numbers on the rise, should North Americans begin to value the contributions of the church in other parts of the world. I think that the faithful lives and perspectives and witness of Christians in the Global South and East should matter regardless of the global census of the church.
2. **Recruiting challenges.** North American agencies might say, “Our culture has changed. We can no longer recruit enough Outsider workers to commit and to stay in a country long term to implement our programs. Therefore, it is pragmatic to partner with Insider groups to implement our programs.” This logic assumes that Insider implementation is mainly a compromise solution. It also assumes that Outsiders are still in charge, supervising and directing the work of the Insider workers even as the action takes place in the cultural and geographic context of the Insiders.
3. **Visa challenges.** Western agencies might say, “The political landscape of the world has changed. We can no longer get visa permission to work in the countries where we want to work. A practical solution is to base Outsiders in a more easily accessible place outside of the country and to work through citizens who already have permission to be in the country.” Unfortunately, this logic also assumes that Outsiders are still in charge, supervising and directing the work of Insiders, but from outside the country.
4. **Danger.** North American agencies might say, “The places where we want to work are too dangerous for Outsiders to be there. It is better for Insiders to work in a dangerous place, because their cultural knowledge and ability to fit in will make them safer.” There are times when Insiders must tell Outsiders that it is better for them to go than to be a burden on the Insiders who need to keep the Outsiders safe. If this logic assumes that North American agencies will continue to direct the work of Insiders from afar, we place an uncomfortable judgment on comparative value of the lives of Outsiders and Insiders.
5. **Stewardship.** North American agencies might say, “The costs of supporting an Outsider family are rising. It makes good business sense to support a local worker whose support costs much less than a foreigner.” This logic assumes that local workers should expect a different level of living allowance, medical care, travel allowance, children’s education costs, and support network than Outsider workers.

6. **Impact.** North American agencies might say, “We partner because it is a more effective way to implement our plans. In recognition that Insiders know their own cultural context best and speak the language better than almost any Outsider, it is best to have local people carry out our program.” This logic may support local efforts while not questioning the problematic assumption that the content of development ideas, theological studies, training materials, music, or peace theology will originate from North American Outsiders.
7. **Postcolonial thinking.** North American agencies might say, “We partner because we don’t want to be colonial. We recognize that mission models may be open to accusations of coercion. We partner to show that we have moved past a colonial model.” Unfortunately, while the term “partnership” might be good for communications or public relations, the use of the term does not guarantee a healthy, equitable, or postcolonial relationship.

I hope that instead of citing rationale for practicality or effectiveness or stewardship or demographics, the world church seeks collaborative relationships as we participate in God’s mission, because we, as the world church, are the result of that mission—“so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

As we all know, figuring out these relationships and working together in various fluid combinations across the church can be messy and slow and full of challenges. In the words of a South African proverb I saw painted on the wall of the Johannesburg airport, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

## Importance of Relationship

Mutual relationships form the foundation for healthy collaboration. Indonesian Anabaptists have a unique story in terms of historic relationships with North America. The Javanese Church grew out of the mission work of Dutch Mennonites during the time when Indonesia was a Dutch colony in the 1800s. North American Mennonite mission agencies did not plant early churches in Indonesia. In the 1920s, an ethnic Chinese family independently became followers of Jesus and asked a Dutch Mennonite missionary, working with the Javanese church, to baptize them. The Muria Church grew out of that community and never came under the supervision of an Outsider agency. The Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Church separated from the Muria Church in the 1970s and also has never been under the wing of an Outsider agency.

At the time of Indonesian Independence after World War II, the Dutch Mennonite missionaries had to leave the country. MCC came at that time to

work with the Javanese church as they experienced famine. MCC set up its office in the same space as the GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa/Evangelical Church of Java) church offices. Over the next thirty years, the affairs of MCC and the Javanese church became entwined in an unhealthy way.

Things came to a head in 1976 when the Indonesian leader of the Ecumenical Indonesian Communion of Churches (himself from the Reformed tradition), observed MCC's relationship with the Javanese church from his vantage point and accused MCC of "spiritual feudalism," refusing to grant a church visa to new MCC representatives.

MCC eventually resolved that issue by moving their office from Pati in Central Java—where the Javanese church was located—to Jakarta. MCC Indonesia entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian government to do development work under a government relationship, rather than having workers on religious visas relating to the church. From 1976 to 2001, the Indonesian churches based in Central Java did not officially relate to MCC representatives living in Jakarta. Instead, they related directly to the MCC Asia Director, who, at that time, was based in Akron, Pennsylvania. The MCC Asia Director made short visits to Indonesia and the churches every eighteen months or so but did not speak the Indonesian language.

When we came to Indonesia in 2001, we were given the opportunity to relate in a different way to Indonesian Anabaptist denominations. We moved the MCC office from Jakarta to Salatiga, in Central Java. This placed MCC's office within one to five hours' drive of the majority of Anabaptist-related congregations. It was close enough for MCC's workers to participate in the regular life of the churches but not be on top of the synods in their office spaces. Dan and I, as MCC representatives, carried the direct relationship with the Indonesian churches and spent considerable relational time with church people. MCC partnered with the synods and also with other partners suggested to MCC by church leaders.

Over time, we came to know more of the background about what happened in 1976. We learned that one of the issues for the Anabaptist-related churches was MCC's title of "representative" for the MCC leader placed in the country. Why should Outsiders have the right to represent the Indonesian churches? Outsider representatives were perceived as a bottleneck, preventing the churches from representing themselves to the larger MCC or to the world church. We learned to carefully word our title as "MCC Representatives *to* Indonesia" instead of "MCC Indonesia Representatives." In our early years, we often clarified that we did not presume to represent Indonesia but that we represented the North American agency of MCC *to* Indonesian churches, institutions, and government. We explained our presence as representatives by saying that MCC respected the Indonesian churches so much that they sent us to be face-to-face representatives in MCC's relationship with the church. It felt important that

representatives be empowered by the organization to be decision-makers so that when church leaders spoke with representatives, they met with peers rather than with messengers or assistants.

MCC's relationships with the church changed because we lived in the same neighborhoods with church folks and because we theoretically had "all the time in the world." We could meet often for fellowship, regular Sunday services, weddings, funerals, and church retreats without always needing to meet with set agendas to "do business" or to make decisions. Our friend, Paulus Hartono, encouraged us to build relationships in the way of Chinese business deals—over very long meals. This quality of relationship had not been possible when the relationship with MCC happened through formal letters or tightly scheduled visits to the country with conversation done through translation.

Relationships require time. I think that people who have participated in young adult exchanges such as Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) and similar programs will lead in developing new ways of collaborative relationships across the world church. Young adults who serve and learn with a host family and a host congregation in another part of the world church do what very few people in this room could do at this point in your lives; they give almost a whole year of their lives to go and be mentored by a host community. They do not go as experts. They do not go as leaders. They do not go because they think they have something great to offer that local people do not have. They go in a very vulnerable way to learn a new language and to allow themselves to be transformed in relationships with people who are very different from themselves.

We have often heard about the value of building relationships by sitting around the table together. MWC leaders and IMA participants and others regularly meet for days at a time in different locations around the globe. But they do not have the opportunity to share in each other's regular daily lives, and they don't have "all the time in the world." In contrast, young adult participants have time to participate in the celebration times, the fun times, the boring times, and the hard times with their host communities. They wash dishes and are helped through embarrassing sicknesses. The relationships developed through YAMEN and other young adult programs will form the basis for future collaboration across the world church. Young adult programs provide a shared opportunity to establish connections, mutuality, sharing, and networking relationships that lay the foundation for the creation of new, shared action plans across the world church.

Intercultural young adult programs change the paradigm of missions. Rather than a one-directional sending of young adults out from a North American home base, a knitted together network of church communities around the world host, mentor, and disciple young adults from other parts of the world. I remember being so impressed with the way a Lao YAMEN alumni led a devo-

tional at the YAMEN re-entry retreat a few years ago. When I asked her where she had learned to preach like that, she told me her host father in India had taught her. I also remember an experienced host family in Indonesia who were so willing and ready to shape the life trajectory of young adult participants that they told us, “Send us the naughty ones.” And I remember hearing a Javanese YAMEN participant telling his church members back home about what it was like to live with his Zimbabwean host family when they were suffering to find food and yet hosted him and included him. Within the global church, I have hope that we can build relationships while appreciating our differences until we are “no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens.”

In conclusion, I offer some suggestions for North American agencies working as Outsiders in God’s mission. I hope these ideas spark conversation.

1. **First, with our long colonial history, it is time for North American agencies to take a back seat when working as a guest in another part of the world.** Development author Robert Chambers emphasized this point in the thought-provoking title of his book *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*.<sup>2</sup> For those of us who have benefited from a long history of White colonial privilege, this means intentionally and actively looking for ways to give up power and control. When we are Outsiders, we need to step back, sit down, listen, learn, and keep ourselves away from the microphone even if we are recognized in our own context as an elder, a leader, or someone with good ideas. That means that our intercultural work will begin to feel very different and unfamiliar. I am not calling us to withdraw from face-to-face relationships between Outsiders and Insiders but to consciously stand down from roles of leadership and direction even if we are invited or pushed to take the roles.
2. **Second, North American agencies working as Outsiders should carefully analyze and question their roles in relationship with Insiders.** Some questions could be:
  - Where is the control in this relationship? Is the line of supervision to Outsiders or Insiders?
  - Who has created the plans and policies that direct this work?
  - Do the roles assigned to Outsiders fit their age and experience in relation to Insiders?
  - Beyond the specific program or project, what relationships do Outsiders have with Insiders?

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<sup>2</sup> London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997.

3. **Third, North American Outsiders working with Insiders should prioritize new initiatives in which joint ownership is possible.** Ownership is different than buy-in. We often talk about buy-in as a good thing, but in the context of North American mission agencies, I think it's colonial. Buy-in happens when one group has a plan, a structure, a program, or an agency and then invites another group to join in after the fact. Buy-in also happens when Outsiders start something and then expect Insiders to step in and take it over in the way that Outsiders used to manage it so that Outsiders can move on to a new place. In contrast, I hope the world church can create something completely new together so that all parties would have an opportunity for ownership in an initiative to serve beyond ourselves.
4. **Fourth, North American agencies should carefully consider language access as a critical part of global long-term relationships.** We need to prioritize local language learning for Outsiders and Access Language learning for all of us. I used to think that English language teaching in an international context was yet another imperialistic imposition. Now, I see English as an access language—simply another tool that makes connections possible across the global church. This is especially needed for Asia, where the colonial languages of English, Spanish, and French are not widely used. I also see a need for a multidirectional translation of materials from world languages like Hindi or Korean or Bahasa Indonesia to English rather than the unidirectional flow of English language materials to other languages.
5. **Fifth, North American agencies should seriously consider the radical sharing of a significant pool of financial resources for God's mission.** What would it look like across Mennonite World Conference if each agency or denomination intentionally gave up a measure of control and identity and committed to a shared pool of funds? And what if the pooled resources were used for new jointly owned initiatives that connect us across the world church in the unity of shared action rather than the "us" and "them" of partnerships? This shared fund would be not a giving from our excess but an equitable and probably painful sharing of doing with less for our independent initiatives so we could do more together. This would be extremely messy and full of challenges, yet in the body of Christ, that's no reason not to try. If you want to go far, go together.
6. **Lastly, North American agencies should join together with other parts of the world church in exercising our imaginations.** What decentralized models haven't we thought of yet? Is the partnership model the pinnacle of the Holy Spirit's leading of our imaginations? Is the business model of partnership really the best type of relationship within the church? Do we

really need the establishment of two formalized entities in order to enter into joint action? Is partnership the best translation of “koinonia”? Wouldn’t a translation of “communion” or “fellowship” serve us better for relationships within the world church? What other models exist? While celebrating our differences, can we give up enough of our separate agency and denominational identities to allow us to act as a world communion? Rather than the “us” and “them” of global partnerships, let us become a united “WE” bearing witness to one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.