

## **A South African Reflection on Mennonite World Conference**

*God is a missionary. Jesus is a missionary Lord. The Holy Spirit is a missionary empowerer. The entire Bible is a missional book. The whole church is a missional people.* – overheard at the Mennonite World Conference Mission Commission meetings

The halls of the Harrisburg Farm Show Complex in the capital of Pennsylvania are abuzz with activity, with numerous Anabaptist and Mennonite organisations having stands that promote their organizations as well as inform those gathered of what they are each involved with. Though the displays are varied, most seem to have a common thread, that of being outwardly or missionally focused.

Among these is Bethren In Christ World Mission (BICWM), which serves among many unevangelized, impoverished, and religiously persecuted areas of the world. BICWM has 80 percent of its global membership outside of North America.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) works as a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, sharing God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. Though their ministry is not focused on planting churches, churches have emerged from its presence and from the desire of MCC workers to share through their lives the gospel of God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ. In line with this cause, MCC coordinates the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN!) in conjunction with Mennonite World Conference. This is where non-North American young adults from Anabaptist congregations can go be a part of developing a community in Africa, Asia, or South America. MCC is accountable to the church, as an integral part of the church's mission.

Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), from Canada, prioritizes global missions and reaching the unevangelized through church planting and training leaders to evangelize and establish healthy churches in their communities. They administer programs in Paraguay, Mexico, Bolivia, and Nicaragua, as well as working in partnership with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.

In addition to the displays, mission was discussed in several settings at the Assembly. At a workshop elective entitled "Holy Cow! What is Holistic Mission?" the question of how we continue the work of Jesus was addressed. James Krabill spoke of how a Mennonite family moved to grow chickens in Nepal during a time when proclamation of the gospel was forbidden. The missional intent of this family was to live amongst the people and have the locals witness their lifestyle. The community over time began asking the family questions, and that gave the family an open door relationally to share their faith in Jesus Christ. Thus a Nepalese community gradually coming to faith. A story was told of how Mennonite churches came alongside local churches in Benin, forming the Interconfessional Council. Without planting churches they were led to open a Health Care center in the city to meet the needs of the community, which led to setting up refuse collection systems and eventually a micro finance bank that also provides affordable health insurance for its clients.

## Anabaptist Witness

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

---

A Pennsylvanian lady named Mary, who is in her late seventies, told us a tale in our Friendship Group<sup>1</sup> of the many years she spent as a missionary in different parts of the world. She also spoke of how glad she was to be at the MWC gathering as it afforded her the opportunity to meet up with some friends and colleagues she met over the decades from different regions of the world. With a sweet smile of nostalgia, she expressed her gratitude at the opportunity she had to go and see the world, and to serve in different contexts and cultures as her witness of her faith. She did this through a Mennonite missions organization.

The sheer diversity of those at MWC Assembly Gathered speaks to the places where Anabaptists have gone in the name of mission. They have left traces of their having passed through in the form of those local inhabitants who caught onto the message of peace and now themselves belong to the numerous congregations of Anabaptist Mennonites across the continents, from Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The Assembly was all colorful, with many skin colors, languages, personalities, attires, and cultures.

All in all, people echoed a message of *going* in various places this week. This message of course is the Great Commission of Christ: for us to *go*! From the conversation on the bus shuttles each morning and evening, to the sermons from the worship services; from the songs and hymns sung in our gathering, to meal times around the tables—the message came up repeatedly. This is best summed up in a quote I will end with, taken from Mzuzi Makawa's evening sermon: "Without mission Anabaptism is nothing! The specificity of the Anabaptist is the mission.... They went to the ends of the earth announcing the good news."

*Pros Ndimande is works with Mennonite Central Committee in Johannesburg, South Africa, as an administrative assistant and as coordinator of Connecting Peoples (Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa).*

1. Participants at the MWC Assembly had the option of participating in small Friendship Groups to discuss the morning plenary speakers.