

# Intersections

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Intersections

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## Embracing a commitment to Christ's way of peace

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Relief. Development. Peace. These three elements, done in the name of Christ, both constitute MCC's tagline and form the foundation of MCC's work around the world. While all three are important to MCC's work, an evolving understanding of what practicing a Jesus-centred peace means has been core to MCC's work and identity for almost all its history. Sometimes, this grappling comes in the form of intellectual and deep theological reflection. Letters, statement, forums and academic studies have accompanied MCC's peace work for decades. In other ways, understanding what peace is in the world comes from practical, lived experiences of individuals and communities attempting to embody the peace Christ instructs. As we set out to solicit reflections for this edition of *Intersections*, we were especially interested in exploring the ways praxis and theology inform one another.

For decades, Anabaptists have developed peace theology as formal reflection on the theological convictions undergirding Christ's way of peace. Theology undeniably informs practice. We embrace peace because of our theology. We wanted to know more about how peace theology, once developed, is applied and put into practice, especially in situations and contexts of active conflict.

At the same time, we were curious how action has shaped theology. On a purely practical level, engaging in peacebuilding works to create positive change in our communities and relationships, here and now. As our contributors note, commitment to Christ's way of peace often leads to community involvement and is formed through immersion in communities of practice, especially communities of faith. This active work of peacebuilding also shapes and shifts theology. This issue of *Intersections* looks to explore both directions: How does peace theology impact action and how does action in response to conflict shape theology?

For MCC, peace is a *goal* of all our work, a *lens* we apply to our work and a *set of practical tools* that are applied to prevent and mitigate violent conflict. The broadness of our understanding of and approaches to peace are also reflected in the contributions of the authors in this edition of *Intersections*, yet each article highlights the practical implications of a peace theology.

**“ How does peace theology impact action and how does action in response to conflict shape theology?”**

This issue includes personal testimony alongside academic reflection, praxis alongside peace theology. The articles include diverse testimonies from people across the globe describing their motivations and practices for creating their own commitments to Christ’s way of peace, commitments embodied in countless contextualized ways. This issue also includes theological declarations about Christ’s way of peace from around the world, as Anabaptist and other churches have sought to name the theological foundations of the church’s commitment to peace and to shape church practice.

A commitment to Christ’s way of peace is a rich tapestry of theology and actions. In the words of Anna Giesbrecht in Mexico’s Colonia Manitoba, this way of living and believing is both practical and profound. We invite you to delve deeply into this practical and profound set of reflections. As you read, reflect on what believing and practicing a commitment to Christ’s way of peace look like in your community and context.

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## **MCC and inter-Anabaptist witness to Christ’s way of peace**

Across its history, MCC has not only undertaken practical ministries of relief, development and peacebuilding in the name of Christ, but has also served as a catalyst for and coordinator of inter-Anabaptist (as well as broader ecumenical) efforts to foster, deepen and expand commitment to Christ’s way of peace. The reflections in this issue of *Intersections* extend this legacy, with authors discerning what shape commitment to Christ’s way of peace takes in their contexts.

MCC’s support for peace theology discernment has included the crafting of inter-Mennonite statements about the nature and shape of the Christian witness for peace. In 1950, the MCC Peace Section convened representatives from different Mennonite and Brethren in Christ denominations in Winona Lake, Indiana, for a study conference about peace and its relationship to the gospel, with the conference concluding with agreement on *A Declaration of Faith and Commitment* that explored the theological foundations and practical implications of nonresistance. Over four decades later, the MCC binational board in 1993 issued a statement entitled *A Commitment to Christ’s Way of Peace*, and then commended the statement to MCC’s supporting churches for study. In this article, I situate these two statements historically and analyze what remains constant and what shifted in the forty-plus years that passed between them.

From its inception, MCC has been an inter-Mennonite venture, bringing Anabaptists together for practical humanitarian action. [Throughout this essay, I use Mennonite and Anabaptist interchangeably—that usage should not obscure the fact that “Anabaptist” as a more general descriptive category for contemporary Mennonite, Amish, Brethren in Christ and other groupings did not become common until the 1960s and 1970s nor the fact that MCC for much of its history used “Mennonite” a broad category.] Yet practical action, including alternative service to war through MCC’s Civilian Public Service and Pax programs, occasioned theological reflection.

**“ The 1950 Winona Lake conference convened by MCC’s Peace Station, with its subsequent *Declaration of Faith and Commitment*, stands as the high-water mark of MCC’s influence and ability to bring divergent Mennonite groups together to lay out a shared theological understanding of peace.”**

The 1950 Winona Lake conference convened by MCC's Peace Section, with the *Declaration of Faith and Commitment* issued by the conference, stands as the high-water mark of MCC's influence and ability to bring divergent Mennonite groups together to lay out a shared theological understanding of peace. Leading Mennonite scholars such as Guy F. Hershberger, J.C. Wenger and Robert Kreider prepared background papers distributed to participants prior to the conference.

The over 70 participants at the Winona Lake conference (almost all of whom were white, male pastors and church conference leaders of Swiss or German-Russian background, with most from the United States, but with some from Canada) grappled in the course of six sessions over three days with questions grouped under the headings of "Nonresistance and the Gospel," "What about the Noncombatant Position?," "The Disciple of Christ and the State," "Nonresistance and the Social Order," "Our Peace Witness to Christendom," and "Nonresistance and Communism." Some study questions had a doctrinal bent—for example, was nonresistance "the root or the fruit of the Gospel?" Other study questions were more practical in nature. How could the traditional nonresistant rejection of all military service be reinforced in the face of an ongoing draft and the attraction of many Mennonite young men to noncombatant military service? As Mennonite communities in the U.S. and Canada became less separated from their surrounding society, in what ways could they faithfully engage that society, including witness to governing authorities? The dawn of the Cold War and the Mennonite experience under communist rule in the Soviet Union also weighed heavily on participants, with participants considering "the causes which contributed to Communism in Russia," including if a "burden of guilt rest[ed] upon the Mennonites in Russia" for having contributed to economic conditions that paved the way for communism.

At the end of these three days of intense consultation, a drafting committee, led by Mennonite scholar and MCC leader Harold S. Bender, produced the *Declaration of Faith and Commitment* (DFC) affirmed by the over 60 official denominational representatives at the study conference as representing a consensus understanding of the demands of Christian love and nonresistance with regards to war and witness to the broader society, including the state. Later that month, MCC Peace Section director J. Harold Shenk described Winona Lake as "an historic conference for the Mennonite group of churches, significant both for our inner life and our witness to others," urging MCC's supporting churches to commend DFC to their congregations for study. DFC received extensive coverage in popular Mennonite periodicals and became a touchstone for denominational discussions of the shape nonresistant witness should take in a post-war reality.

DFC advanced a more active understanding of the traditional doctrine of nonresistance, linking "nonresistance and peacemaking" as essential elements of "full discipleship." Conference participants underscored that the Christian peace witness flows from the "redeeming grace of God." A full understanding of discipleship, DFC contended, requires active witness through ministries of service and "to the life of full discipleship and to the pursuit of peace and love without limit." This witness of love is manifested first and foremost within the church, as the "universal community and brotherhood within which the fullness of Christ's reign must be practiced."



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**The Christian responsibility to strive for *justice* emerged in CCWP, including the claim that ‘there is no peace without justice,’ a statement that provoked objections from some Anabaptist groups in Canada and the U.S.”**

Yet Christian witness also extends beyond the inner life of the church, with disciples called to witness to Christ’s way of peace through service. “Christian love and redemptive action” as expressed in ministries of service stand as a counterpoint to “the use of force and war in futile attempts to solve the urgent problems of our world.” God may have set “the state in its place of power” with the “ministry” of ordering society, but its authority is “always and provisional and relative,” set under Christ’s lordship. While faith does not offer a “blueprint for peace,” it sets limits to the service Christians can provide the social order and the state, with Christians unable to “compromise with war in any form,” including *all* forms of military service, the purchase of war bonds or allowing conscription efforts in Mennonite schools.

A strong undercurrent of modesty and even self-critique runs through *DFC*. “We humbly confess our inadequacies and failures both in understanding and in following this way,” conference participants underscored, “knowing well that we have come short both in demonstration and proclamation of Christian love.” *DFC* calls for “sharper Christian control of our economic, social and cultural practices among ourselves and toward others,” concerned that Christians were failing in their communal witness to present an alternative to communism.

*DFC* proved to be a durable statement of common Mennonite peace theology convictions. By the early 1990s, however, MCC recognized that numerous contextual changes over the past four decades justified revisiting shared peace theology convictions. The Cold War, which had loomed prominently in the background during the Winona Lake conference, was now over, and mandatory military service in the United States had ended. Mennonites had become more actively involved in protesting militarism and war and agitating for social justice, including speaking out against the U.S.-led war in Vietnam, getting involved in the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., advocating for the rights of Indigenous First Nations peoples in Canada and highlighting the structural violence of the global trade system. Mennonites had also given leadership to emerging fields of conciliation and peacebuilding.

The MCC Peace Committee, consisting of Mennonite theologians and church leaders from Canada and the U.S. and convened by and serving in an advisory capacity to the MCC binational Peace Office (previously Peace Section), took on the task to articulate what a peace theology within these changing realities would demand. The committee’s final product, *Commitment to Christ’s Way of Peace* (CCWP), was adopted in 1993 by the MCC binational board, and then shared with the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ denominations in Canada and the U.S. for their consideration. The Mennonite Church General Assembly in the U.S. endorsed the CCWP statement at its 1993 session, while the Conference of Mennonites in Canada endorsed the statement at its 1994 session.

The 1993 CCWP statement maintained several emphases from the 1950 *DFC*: a confession of how Mennonites have fallen short in their commitment to Christ’s way of peace, the foundational reliance of Christian peace-making on God’s grace, an understanding of the church as a sign of God’s renewal of the world, the provisional legitimacy of the state’s ordering role (with that legitimacy always standing under Christ’s judgment), a rejection of military service as incompatible with Christian discipleship and the need for Christians’ economic lives to be shaped by Christ’s way of peace.

*CCWP* also diverged from *DFC* in important respects. Reference to non-resistance was supplemented with the language of nonviolence and active peacemaking, including the declaration that “We will resist evil and oppression in the nonviolent spirit of Jesus.” The Christian responsibility to strive for *justice* emerged in *CCWP*, including the claim that “there is no peace without justice,” a statement that provoked objections from some Anabaptist groups in Canada and the U.S. *CCWP* more clearly acknowledged than did *DCF* that Christians committed to Christ’s way of peace can faithfully serve in many government functions. The authors of *CCWP*, meanwhile, highlighted that the peace witness was not solely bound up with witness against war, but involved action against the violent destruction of creation, the violence of racism and the violence that reaches “into our churches and into our families.” *CCWP*’s authors also recognized that discerning the faithful shape of peace theology today requires discernment with the global church. *CCWP* sought to provide a theological framework for understanding how the church’s witness to Christ’s way of peace was changing, while tracing continuity with previous articulations of that witness: the statement proved durable for decades, referenced by denominational leaders and academics as a concise representation of shifts in Anabaptist peace witness.

Today, three decades after *CCWP* was first published, MCC continues to discern with the global church what commitment to Christ’s way of peace looks like in specific contexts. While at times in its history MCC has been called to help articulate inter-Mennonite statements of shared peace convictions, as was the case with *DCF* and *CCWP*, more frequently MCC convened inter-Mennonite and broader ecumenical conversations about the shape peace theology takes in ever-shifting realities. The articles in this issue of *Intersections* carry on that legacy.

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#### **Five declarations from the *Declaration of Faith and Commitment* (MCC, 1950)**

1. It is our faith that one is our Master, even Christ, to whom alone supreme loyalty and obedience is due, who is our only Savior and Lord.
2. It is our faith that by the renewing grace of God which makes us new creatures in Christ, and alone thereby, we can through the power of the indwelling Spirit live the life of holy obedience and discipleship to which all the sons of God are called, for His grace does forgive and heal the penitent sinner and brings us to a new life of fellowship with Him and with one another.
3. It is our faith that redeeming love is at the heart of the Gospel, coming from God and into us to constrain us to love Him and our neighbor, and that such love must henceforth be at the center of every thought and act.
4. It is our faith that Christ has established in His church a universal community and brotherhood within which the fullness of Christ’s reign must be practiced, into which the redeemed must be

brought, and from which must go out into all human society the saving and healing ministry of the Gospel.

5. It is our faith that the life of love and peace is God's plan for the individual and the race, and that therefore discipleship means the abandonment of hatred, strife and violence in all human relations, both individual and social.

#### Excerpts from *Commitment to Christ's Way of Peace* (MCC, 1993)

“As our congregations have reached out to become more diverse, we have grown in our awareness of the effects of sin and the need to be peacemakers. We have learned that violence can be done not only in warfare, but also through economic structures. We have seen the world's fragile ecosystem endangered by careless treatment of the natural environment. We have struggled against the effects of racism. We have come to realize that violence can reach into our churches and into our families.”

“In humility we confess our failures in following this way, and our shortcomings in both demonstrating and proclaiming Christ's love. As we renew our commitment to Christ's way, we acknowledge our need of God's grace and each other's help in learning and obeying. With the hope that God gives us, we once more commit ourselves to live holy lives worthy of our calling and to discover anew Christ's message of reconciliation and peace for the world today.”

## Embracing Christ's way of peace: the key to peaceful coexistence in Kenya

 **KMC believes that these collective efforts for peaceful elections successfully reduced tensions, mitigated conflicts and encouraged political leaders to prioritize peaceful engagement over divisive rhetoric.”**

The Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC) has promoted peace and justice in Kenya since the onset of multiparty politics in 1992. The church, made up of over 12,000 members across various regions, is grounded in Christ's way of peace and believes that God's plan for humanity is characterized by peace, justice and love. KMC's core beliefs and principles guide its involvement in community life, including fostering peaceful elections and addressing challenges that often arise during the country's general elections. The church embraces Mennonite peace theology, emphasizing nonviolent teachings and advocating for alternatives to violence, such as dialogue, reconciliation and active nonviolence.

Kenya holds elections every five years. These elections are crucial for democracy, allowing citizens to choose their representatives. However, previous elections have been plagued by violence, fraud and ethnic tensions, undermining stability and peaceful transitions of power. In the run-up to the national elections in August 2022, Kenya experienced similar tensions and ethnic divisions, causing significant fear among citizens about potential election violence. As a peace church, KMC took action to educate others and help prevent conflicts.

### **Practical example of Christ's way of peace: fostering peaceful elections:**

KMC was involved in various conflict resolution initiatives before, during and after the 2022 general elections, providing a safe space for individuals and communities to address conflicts and find peaceful resolutions.

Before the elections, KMC participated in civic and voter education through its network with the National Council of Churches (NCCCK), educating citizens on their rights and responsibilities to be active, informed voters. KMC conducted voter education in congregations across its dioceses using a curriculum provided by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), targeting disadvantaged groups like women, youth and people with disabilities. Special messages were sent to the marginalized segments, including young adults eligible to vote, encouraging voter turnout and explaining how to register and cast ballots.

Additionally, KMC organized four trainings targeting community members in Migori, Kisumu and Eldoret, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the challenging election period with wisdom and grace. At the end of the sessions, KMC held press conferences that helped get the message about the importance of peaceful elections out more widely. These trainings continued even after the elections. For example, in March 2023, KMC collaborated with MCC and the Africa Peacebuilding Institute (API) through API's "Learning Pod" program, to train 20 KMC leaders on peace-related topics, including foundations for peace, divine justice and peace theory, trauma healing and awareness, peace and governance, conflict management and reconciliation. After the training, participants came up with ideas on how to build peace in their churches and communities on an ongoing basis rather than just waiting until election time.

KMC also fostered interfaith collaboration with leaders from different religious communities, including the Interreligious Council of Kenya (ICK) initiative through the NCCCK network. KMC moderator, Rev. Samson Omondi, and Rev. Josphat Kimani of Shalom Mennonite Church in Eldoret played vital roles at the national level and the North Rift valley region, respectively, during the election period, issuing press statements emphasizing shared values and a common commitment to a peaceful society that transcends religious boundaries.

During the elections, KMC actively participated in observing and monitoring the electoral process. Sixteen of its church members participated in the Elections Observation Group (ELOG) program, a long-term national forum of civil society and faith-based organizations involved in monitoring and observing elections. KMC identified the monitors and recommended them to the IEBC for training before they took up roles as elections observers at various polling stations and counting centers in six KMC dioceses in western Kenya. They helped ensure that the elections were conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

The Kenyan elections of August 2022 were largely peaceful, and it was encouraging to see KMC joining a broader national effort for peaceful elections. KMC believes that these collective efforts successfully reduced tensions, mitigated conflicts and encouraged political leaders to prioritize peaceful engagement over divisive rhetoric. Moreover, such efforts fostered long-term reconciliation within communities extending beyond the election period. The work, however, is far from complete. For example, from Janu-

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**The legacy of the church's involvement in promoting peace will serve as a reminder of the transformative power of faith and unity in establishing a peaceful future for all."**

ary to April 2023, political conflict erupted in some parts of the country, with the opposition occasionally resorting to violent demonstrations against the government. It therefore remains crucial to continue supporting dialogue and peacebuilding.

KMC has gained valuable insight and lessons through this experience: that Christ's way of peace—dialogue, reconciliation, and non-violent engagement—can foster a peaceful electoral process. These lessons shape KMC's vision and guide its strategies for future involvement in electoral processes and ongoing community peacebuilding efforts. By continuously adapting and improving its approaches, KMC can make an even greater impact in promoting peace, justice and unity in Kenya. KMC remains committed to Christ's way of peace, ensuring that its involvement in elections leaves a positive and lasting legacy on the nation's political climate. As Kenya moves forward, this legacy of the church's involvement in promoting peace will serve as a reminder of the transformative power of faith and unity in establishing a peaceful future for all.

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**Excerpts from "Peace Now!" A statement by the Heads of Churches of South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), 2018. Available at [https://cpn.nd.edu/assets/285974/sscc\\_july\\_2018.pdf](https://cpn.nd.edu/assets/285974/sscc_july_2018.pdf).**

"We as the Shepherds of the People of South Sudan continue to mourn and grieve for our country. Our hearts pain for the suffering, tired, hungry flock and for our leaders with all their fears, anger and trauma as they struggle both across our nation, the region and the world."

"We have spoken out for peace and justice, and we have called for our leaders to be accountable and we pledge to work continually for peace in our country, encouraging all of our people to hold on to faith and hope, trusting wholeheartedly that peace will return to our country sooner rather than later. We believe and therefore we speak!"

"Peace is the call of the hearts of all the people of South Sudan."

"We continue to express our prophetic voice, as we listen and are guided by the Holy Spirit. We reach out to all the leaders without seeking popularity or favour, acting to remind them of their duties to protect life. We seek to pursue a vision that will bring our people out of the desert of this violence to an oasis of peace where all the fragmented people of South Sudan will seek a vibrant and cohesive nation that is one people, one nation, and one South Sudan. Oh God bless South Sudan."

## Self-esteem, grief and peacebuilding with women in Low German Mennonite colonies in Mexico

Colonia Manitoba in Ciudad Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, is the largest Mennonite settlement in Mexico (and probably in Latin America), with approximately 50,000 inhabitants and a settlement history that spans over a hundred years. The Mennonites who arrived here in 1922 from Canada belonged to the Old Colony Church, which sought to preserve the lifestyle and religious traditions of their ancestors. Most of the inhabitants of that colony continue to adhere to old customs regarding their native language, religious beliefs and social organization. In the Mennonite world in Mexico, the children of the settlers are known as *Low Germans*, after the language they speak.

Over time, some of the grandchildren of the original settlers began to open up to the outside world, driving social change. They self-identify as *liberals*, at least here in Mexico. Many have had a Christian conversion experience that has led them to carry out social and missionary works in their community to meet community needs. Due to the social organization of the Colony itself, not all Mennonites have access to the same type of education, nor do they have the same tools for healthcare.

Women, for example, may face recurring problems related to mental health and cancer. Among the Low German Mennonites there are no professional doctors who attend to these cases, nor is there a culture of prevention or seeking psychological therapy to combat the depression or anxiety that many Mennonite women face. The self-described liberal Mennonites have taken on the task of offering listening spaces, self-esteem workshops, Spanish literacy education and translation services for women who want to go to the doctor without their husbands.

For these Colony members, helping women access essential health services contributes to peace based on social justice. The ensuing paragraphs capture part of my interview with Anna Giesbrecht, a member of a Low German colony in Mexico, about the Sister Care initiative that works for peace by promoting self-care and healing among women. Giesbrecht radiates peace and compassion. She lives with her husband and children in Colonia Manitoba (the largest Mennonite colony in Mexico). For approximately ten years, she has served her community by training groups of Low German Mennonite women on various topics, primarily in the areas of physical and mental health, but also spiritual well-being.

*Anna, tell me how the work with Mennonite women in Colonia Manitoba began.* I received training from Sister Care from Ofelia García, Linda Shelly and Olga Piedrasanta around 2013 or 2014. It was a weekend training in Campo 38.5, and the work began after that, but during the following years, I attended Ofelia's course three more times. That way I prepared more material in German to share with the sisters or the women in the groups.

*What was your experience in taking the Sister Care training?* For me, it was very practical and profound. In my experience, the topics of self-esteem and grief were impactful. And in general, these are topics that impact women.

**ff** For these Colony members, this is a way to contribute to the construction of peace based on social justice, because by trying to balance the tools and experiences of Mennonite women and children in the Colony, what they seek is to bring them a little closer to the comprehensive peace of God, while helping them improve their lives, increase their capabilities, and share with them the good news of salvation.”

**“ Here in rural areas, women are always very active, working a lot, and they hardly take time for themselves.”**

*How many groups of women have you worked with on these topics?* I have worked with 15 groups of approximately 20 or 30 women each. And all of them are women from the Colony.

*How do you use the Sister Care materials and in what language?* All the materials I have are in High German, but in the groups, I use them in Low German. What I do is look for articles in a Christian magazine in German that arrives every three months. From there, I take many of the materials I use in the workshops that fit with the themes in the magazine.

*Have the women who participate in these spaces told you how they feel?* We have a class for them to share, and in general, they all talk about how they have adopted things from the workshops into their lives. I feel they have decided to change their lifestyles. Because here in rural areas, women are always very active, working a lot, and they hardly take time for themselves. So, what they share is that they have made the decision to take more time for themselves and for their Bible study, and that is good.

*How has this work impacted the new generations, the children or grandchildren of the women with whom you work?* As they take more time for their Bible study, they transmit that practice to their children and grandchildren. And I also see that, in most women, their self-esteem has risen, they have worked through grief in their lives and they can also teach that to their children or grandchildren.

*How can this work contribute to peacebuilding in the Colony?* I think that if there is peace in the home, that is also transmitted to the community. I will share two examples. One of the women, whom I admire, when I met her, she offered her house to have the study. Her husband was an alcoholic, and she was going through very difficult times, but she started coming without her husband's permission, in other words, without her husband knowing. Later, she told her husband and he gave her permission for us to have the meetings at their house, and we went to her house once a week for two-and-a-half years. Then she and her husband accepted Christ and now they are members of the Blumaneau church. She oversees the church's food committee, and he participates in the funeral committee. That is an example where I see that her lifestyle has changed.

The other example is of a young woman whom I met in another study. Her husband is very active in the community, but she suffered from depression. So, when she started going to these studies, she began to talk and we were able to work on the issues in her life. After that, her husband agreed to be on the rehabilitation center committee. Although it was difficult, this woman was, with the encouragement of Bible study, able to overcome her depression, change her life and has been very active as well.

*Could you share a word of encouragement for other women who are also working with women?* My experience is that at first, women are very closed off, but that changes. They start to open up, sometimes it takes time, but they do. Not all of them accept Christ, but most of them do, especially when we work on the topics of self-esteem and grief.

*Interview conducted on May 25, 2023, by Rubama Pedroza, MCC Mexico facilitator of training processes, with Anna Giesbrecht, facilitator of the Sister Care program in Colonia Manitoba, Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico.*

## Young peacebuilders: transforming lives and communities in Cali, Colombia

At the intersection of biblical teachings and philosophy, two young peace builders, Darlin Dayana Viveros and Victoria Caicedo, stand out as inspiring examples. Although their paths began in different contexts, they converge in their strong belief in the transformative power of serving society. As Matthew 5:16 states, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Both young women have embraced the idea of being beacons of good deeds in their pursuit of a better world.

Darlin and Victoria are both connected to The Education for Peace Foundation—Edupaz, an organization of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Valle del Cauca, with 25 years of experience in accompanying rural, Afro-descendant communities in educational and peacebuilding programs for children, adolescents, young people and adults to contribute to nonviolent conflict transformation and reconciliation among communities immersed in conflicts.

Darlin is 19 years old and a volunteer at Edupaz. She studies early childhood education with the aim of teaching in the Colombian educational system. Her commitment to peace and education motivates her to be an active part of pedagogical projects that promote harmony and learning. Darlin embarked on her journey during her last year of high school when she was elected, along with another student, to represent her peers in Edupaz’s APP Network (Acción Pedagógica de Paz, or Pedagogical Action for Peace). Inspired by the words of Martin Luther, she understood that “active faith is love,” with love manifested through service to others. Darlin’s journey began with a profound experience at an Edupaz Encounter House, where the teachings of Thomas Aquinas came to life, with the realization that “peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it is the presence of justice.” This moment marked the beginning of her commitment to promoting peace and justice.

The impact of Darlin’s experience at the Encounter House was revealing. She found warmth and kindness that broke through her initial shyness and taught her the importance of community in personal growth. Her horizon expanded to embrace not only peace and justice, but also environmental protection and citizen participation in building a better society.

Through the Edupaz Youth Network, Darlin immersed herself in conflict resolution projects, working closely with other young people. Together, the group addressed problems in schools and communities from a perspective of justice and constructive conflict resolution. These challenging projects left a profound mark on Darlin and strengthened her commitment to tirelessly work for peace and justice in her community and beyond.

Her experience also led her to consider careers related to peace and justice, understanding that serving the community not only develops individual skills but also empowers young people by giving them a voice and a platform to advocate for positive change. Her message is clear: young

**“Inspired by the words of Martin Luther, Darlin understood that ‘active faith is love,’ and that this love must manifest itself through service to others.”**

From left, Elizabeth Tovar (left), Leonor Mesa and Leticia Stucky walk together during the 2017 peace march in Bogotá, Colombia. Every September 21, the International Day of Peace, Nonviolence, and Ceasefires, Mennonites in Colombia celebrate “Pan y Paz” or Bread and Peace. Some churches march in the street and hand out bread, reminding those they meet that peace is not possible without social justice. Peace must be accompanied by bread. As they march, the church members call on the Colombian state to implement just economic policies that ensure there is enough for everyone. (MCC photo/Anna Vogt)



peacebuilders are essential to changing the community’s perception, strengthening community bonds and developing valuable life skills.

Victoria is 24 years old, a student of economics, and a systems technician. Currently, she works as an economist in a technological development center, carries out social service activities in the church with older adults and volunteers with the Edupaz foundation. Victoria finds inspiration in Matthew 5:16 for her peacebuilding commitment, with its emphasis on the duty to be a beacon of good deeds. She immersed herself from a young age in work within the church and social groups with the aim of better understanding the reality of her community and exploring how, through discipleship, she and her peers can implement actions that contribute to the well-being of families.

Edupaz provided opportunities for Victoria’s personal development, even during pandemic closures, as she joined training courses in peacebuilding and youth empowerment. She participated in awareness-raising about mental health care and drug prevention, reflecting her conviction that working for societal peace includes addressing peace and the individual and family level.

Through her participation in these activities, the importance of thoroughly understanding the environment and the needs of people became evident to Victoria. Not all communities face the same challenges or require the same solutions. As Victoria established relationships with more young people, she observed how their lives improved when they received support and acceptance in society. Her message is clear: the impacts of support on a young person’s life can vary in effectiveness, but what is crucial is to make the maximum effort to improve the situation of these young people.

As two young peacebuilders, both Darlin and Victoria represent a generation committed to transforming lives and communities through service,

compassion and justice. Their experience is a living testimony that young people have the power to change the world for the better. In a world where peace and justice are crucial, their message is a reminder that serving the community and committing to fundamental values are the path to a brighter future for all.

*Article submitted by Edupaz.*

 **Victoria finds inspiration in Matthew 5:16 for her peacebuilding commitment, with its emphasis on the duty to be a beacon of good deeds.”**

**Excerpts from the joint “Bread and Peace Declaration” from the Colombian Mennonite Church, Mennonite Brethren Churches of Colombia and the Brethren in Christ Church of Colombia, September 21, 2002.**

On the occasion of the International Day for Peace and Nonviolence called by United Nations, September 21:

1. As followers of Jesus, son of God, who we recognize as sovereign God, we affirm our biblical and historical conviction to the way of peace as active nonviolence and love for neighbor, especially for the weak, the marginalized, the poor and the enemy.
2. We will not take part in armed proposals in the quest for peace. We consider that the efforts to force all of the population to take sides in the armed conflict, on the side of the State or on the side of illegal armed groups, is a false alternative because both sides use the same logic of weapons and violence.
3. We are opposed to participating in armed groups or paying for others to do so. We are opposed to the militarization of the economy and we advocate for the right to conscientious objection to all armed service.
4. We believe that peace is an issue that belongs to everyone and so we will continue to seek peace with justice for and with everyone, carrying out constructive conversations and actions with any group that is willing to consider negotiated and nonviolent solutions to the country’s problems, with reconciliation as the horizon.
5. We encourage the government, armed groups and the media to set aside attitudes of war and to enter into conversations and actions for peace, making substantial and fundamental concessions for the building of a new country, with full guarantees for human dignity with social and legal justice, including housing, employment, land, security, education, health and democratic freedom.
6. We call the international community, and especially the citizens of the United States, to halt their contributions through finances, weapons or advisory support for the war in Colombia, and to contribute to the well-being of the world by supporting and approving participation in the International Criminal Court.
7. We invite the movements for peace and nonviolence in Colombia to set aside their divisions and to take on a more active role for peace in our country.

## Peaceful practices amid polarization and theological differences

I nervously tapped my foot in my chair as I listened to my peers wondering what I would say when it was my turn to share. The Mosaic Conference staff had gathered around a table as part of a listening tour to share our perspectives after the recent Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) delegate assembly in which the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation, with its affirmation of full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the church and its repentance of past exclusion, had passed.

The conversation that morning was difficult. We did our best to be vulnerable and honest with one another. Like many MC USA conferences, Mosaic's congregations have different perspectives and theology when it comes to human sexuality and church membership of LGBTQ persons. The conversation is made more challenging by a conflict-avoidant culture. Layered on top were cultural differences regarding authority structures, orientation toward individual and community, thought processes, differences between honor ethics and justice ethics and more. All of this made the discernment and community process very complicated. With this wide spectrum of views, it is often hard to hold community together—unless the community has a strong center.

Since that initial meeting, our conference has learned to navigate community life in deep and difficult ways. As Anabaptists, we value community life and being in fellowship with one another highly. With the increase of polarization in the United States on matters such as human sexuality, it has been a challenge to address and resolve conflict in healthy, restorative ways that do not further divide us. There are several ways that we as a conference have tried to live into Christ's way of peace as we navigate our differences.

We have learned that it is essential for a faith community to stay connected to God. James 4:8 says, "Draw close to God and God will draw close to you." During our discernment process as a conference about the MC USA Repentance and Transformation resolution, we agreed to undertake prayer and fasting. This communal practice became foundational because it declared that we wanted to be grounded in God and we were expectantly waiting to hear from God. Prayer is not about changing God, but God changing us. In times of conflict and disagreement, we each need to be committed to God and open to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the community. That commitment to God and prayer allows us to confront our anxieties and fears, face our own wrongdoing and remain open. It feels basic or obvious that the faith community should be committed to God and prayer, but often we fail to return to such foundational practices. Because of our anxiety or fear, we cling to our power and control and do not open ourselves to being changed by God.

In Mosaic, we started a rhythm of weekly prayer groups and invited members of the conference to choose a day to fast. 2 Chronicles 7:14 declares that "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." It may come as no surprise, but the community began to hear from God.

 **As Anabaptists, we value community life and being in fellowship with one another highly. With the increase of polarization, it has been a challenge to address and resolve conflict in healthy, restorative ways that do not further divide us."**

We began to have a clearer consensus of the direction God was taking us. The rest of the discernment process was, of course, not all straightforward. There were certainly difficult moments to endure and disagreement present, but with collective prayer and God at the foundation, we trusted that God was with us and would guide us into our next step as a conference. This practice also allowed us to trust more in one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ. By doing so, we were all orienting ourselves to Jesus, who is our center.

Another practice from our Anabaptist theology that shaped our discernment was humble listening. Being curious about another person's perspective when we fundamentally disagree with them is challenging. We come to conversations with our prepared remarks and a perception of the other as an enemy. We look to convince the other person that they are wrong and should think more like us. Just as we invite people to be curious in their intercultural relationships, we had to invite people to be curious when it came to discussing human sexuality, racism, sexism, women in leadership, nationalism, politics, poverty and other topics that divide our church. The Christ hymn in Philippians 2 shows us the character of Jesus and invites us to participate in the same humility. We don't use our power, legal status, intellect or wealth to oppress or belittle others, but rather we seek to serve one another. In practicing this humility, we remain open to being wrong and to changing. We recognize that, as disciples, we still have more to learn. Being in relationship with others who don't agree with us strengthens unity in the body of Christ.

Finally, as conference leadership, we had to model healthy conversation as we worked at peaceful practices. This meant learning things like how to express emotions in appropriate ways, not demonizing people with whom we disagree and learning to name the conflict. Patrick Lencioni identifies the two most common dysfunctions as absence of trust and fear of conflict. As a leadership team, we had to learn how to embrace our conflict, whatever the topic. We worked to understand our differences, build trust and break down fear of one another.

We are still working at navigating differences about human sexuality but undoubtedly there has been a movement of the Spirit among us. Where once it felt like there was no way forward, now there is a spirit of curiosity and creative problem solving. Our theological views have not changed, but our ability to love one another and celebrate our differences has become clearer. In the language of Scott Peck, we have moved past chaos, emptied ourselves and are moving toward true community as we work to embody Christ's way of peace.

*Danilo Sanchez is the leadership minister for intercultural transformation with Mosaic Conference. He lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania.*



### **The Christ hymn in Philippians 2**

**shows us the character of Jesus and invites us to participate in the same humility. We don't use our power, legal status, intellect, or wealth to oppress or belittle others, but rather we seek to serve one another. In practicing this humility, we remain open to being wrong and to changing. We recognize that as disciples, we still have more to learn. Being in relationship with others who don't agree with us strengthens the unity in the body of Christ."**

**ff** **Another practice from our Anabaptist theology that we began to do more of was humble listening. It's not easy to be curious about another person's perspective when we fundamentally disagree with them."**

Excerpts from "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." Kairos Palestine document, issued by Palestinian Christian leaders on December 11, 2009. Available at <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>.

"We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God's divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God's love for all, the mystery of God's divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging—a word of faith, hope and love."

"The mission of the Church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away."

"We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence."

## **A voyage to peace—encounters with forgotten Christians**

**ff** **My calling as a peacemaker came to me slowly, beginning when I visited mission fields with my youth group. I came to learn about the painful realities experienced by residents in armed conflict areas in the Philippines, Burundi and Somalia."**

I began attending church as a first-year high school student and received Jesus as my Lord about a year later. It was the beginning of my faith journey. The first church I belonged to was closed to those who followed different paths of faith. My sense of belonging to church deepened, but so did my apathy and enmity to those outside my church community.

It was 20 years later when I realized that I, as a Christian, must live for peace. My calling as a peacemaker came to me slowly, beginning when I visited mission fields with my youth group. I came to learn about the painful realities experienced by residents in armed conflict areas in the Philippines, Burundi and Somalia. During this time, I was invited to further my theology studies in Heidelberg, Germany. I came to befriend a Mennonite

named Fernando Enns, who was a student in the theology department. I had thought Anabaptism only existed in history books, but I learned that there was a Mennonite community in a village called Bammental, only 15 kilometers from Heidelberg. Towards the end of my doctoral studies, I was invited to spend six months in the Bammental community, where I experienced the peace traditions of Mennonites firsthand. I wrote my dissertation on how my faith, with its fundamentalist beginnings, transformed into a more open faith that embraces and serves others. I named this transformation process *ecumenical conversion* (*ökumenische Konversion* in German).

While I was studying for my final church history oral examination, Bammental community members helped prepare me by getting me to the Mennonite research center (Mennonitische Forschungsstelle) in Weierhof and even conducted mock examinations. After completing my degree, I visited Mennonite missionaries in the Bosnian conflict zone. Learning about the atrocities committed by Christians against Muslims, I felt it was my mission to find out what God might have done for the victims and to put it into practice.

Later, when I was back in Korea, I joined other young Koreans to create a community for peace called The Frontiers. We were driven by the conviction that we should play a more proactive role in bringing about peace. Many of these young Koreans had visited the Bammental community with me—The Frontiers was inspired in many ways by what we learned there. We provided assistance to victims of armed conflict in East Timor, Afghanistan and the refugee camps in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Currently, we are working in Aceh, Indonesia, and in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. We strive to instill hope so that people can overcome hatred and move toward a peaceful future.

**Inter-island solidarity for just peace:** We are also a major part of an anti-war movement on Korea's Jeju Island, site of a huge naval base. Jeju Island has a tragic history: in 1948, as many as 30,000 residents were accused of being communists and were massacred by the government. Most of the victims were innocent civilians, including many women and children. This is the so-called 4.3 incident. In memory of this tragedy, the South Korean government designated Jeju Island as the Island of World Peace in 2005. However, the construction of an enormous naval base began only a few years later. I believed that as the Island of Peace, Jeju should be demilitarized. In our effort to stop the construction of the naval base, I learned other groups had been resisting military bases in Okinawa and Taiwan, and we began to communicate with one another. Together, we started an inter-island solidarity camp for peace in 2014. The peace camp was held in Okinawa in 2015, Taiwan in 2016, Ishigaki Island in 2017, Jeju in 2018, Jinmen Island in 2019, and after a brief stop due to the coronavirus, another peace camp was held in Miyakojima in 2023.

**Jonah's Whale and sailing for peace:** As another step on the journey of peacemaking, I decided to sail from Jeju to Kyushu, Okinawa and Taiwan on a yacht with other peace activists to support and encourage the islanders opposed to military bases. This journey was inspired by the Golden Rule Peace Boat Project, in which four activists attempted to cross the Pacific in 1958 to protest nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands. While Golden Rule did not reach its destination of Eniwetok and Bikini Island, I was touched by how this movement turned the sea and islands, threatened

**“While Golden Rule did not reach its destination of Eniwetok and Bikini Island, I was touched by how this movement turned the sea and islands, threatened by war, into a stage for peace activities.”**



Song Kang-Ho leads the course, Peace Voyage, in the Summer of 2023, while sailing a yacht in the open sea around various islands where military bases continue to expand. (Photo courtesy of Song Kang-Ho)



**I do not believe we can eliminate all military bases from the world in my generation, but I do believe we can and must get rid of the military base occupying our village.”**

by war, into a stage for peace activities. In 2019, I acquired a small used yacht and gave it a new name, *Jonah's Whale*. I opened a course called Peace Voyage and trained youth how to sail a yacht in the open sea. During the summer of 2023, I went on my first voyage with four members for 107 days, sailing to various islands, including Jeju, Okinawa and Taiwan, where military bases continue to expand. The residents of each island, who have long struggled to abolish military bases, warmly welcomed us. We heard their fear of war that always looms large and their earnest hope to pass on a peaceful world to their children. We pledged to continue our resistance until we close the military bases on our islands.

I do not believe we can eliminate all military bases from the world in my generation, but I do believe we can and must get rid of the military base occupying our village. I believe this is the responsibility of all those who wish to leave our children a peaceful world without war.

I started to learn peace theology through my own ecumenical conversion. Turning to God in this violent world requires humble and bold steps to follow Jesus Christ, the lamb of God. While I continue to convert myself to God as a new creation in Christ, I will also prepare for the next voyage to find forgotten Christians of the islands and find the suffering God of all islands.

*Song Kang-Ho is co-founder of The Frontiers and lives in Jeju Island, South Korea.*

**Excerpts from the “Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace by the National Council of Churches of Churches in Korea,” 1988. Available at <https://www.doam.org/partner/kncc/4163-1988-declaration-on-reunification-and-peace>.**

Jesus Christ came to this land as the “Servant of Peace” (Ephesians 2:13-19), to proclaim within division, conflict and oppression God’s Kingdom of peace, reconciliation and liberation (Luke 4:18; John 14:27). Jesus Christ suffered, died upon the Cross, was buried, and rose in the Resurrection to reconcile humanity to God, to overcome divisions and conflicts, and to liberate all people and make them one (Acts 10:36-40). Jesus Christ blessed the peacemakers and called them the children of God (Matthew 5:9). We believe that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the eschatological future of history, will make us one, and enable us to become partners in God’s mission (John 14:18-21; 16:13-14; 17:11).

We believe that all of us who are members of the churches of Korea have been called to labor as apostles of peace (Colossians 3:15). God has commanded the Korean churches to undertake the mission of overcoming today’s harsh reality of our one people divided north and south in confrontation, and we are thus obligated to work for the realization of unification and peace (Matthew 5:23-24).

With this confession of our faith as a foundation, the National Council of Churches in Korea hereby declares its position on peace and the reunification of our nation before the churches of Korea

and the world ecumenical community, at the same time directing an appeal in the spirit of prayer to all our Korean compatriots and to the leaders of government in both north and south.

We confess that the Christians of the south especially have sinned by making a virtual religious idol out of anticommunist ideology and have thus not been content merely to treat the communist regime in the north as the enemy, but have gone further and damned our northern compatriots and others whose ideology differs from our own (John 13:14-15; 4:20-21). Not only does this sin violate the commandment, it has also become the sin of indifference toward those neighbors who have suffered and continue to suffer because of our national division. It is furthermore the sin of failure to ameliorate their suffering through the love of Christ (John 13:17).

We Christians must practice the Gospel of peace and reconciliation so that the just and peaceful Kingdom of God may come (Ephesians 2:14-17), and to bring this about we must share in the suffering of our people. Such participation is the only way our nation's reconciliation and reunification can be realized, thus concern and efforts on behalf of reunification are a matter of faith for us. By overcoming the division which threatens the life of the Korean people and endangers world peace, reunification becomes the way leading us from conflict and confrontation to reconciliation and coexistence, and finally to one community for our people.

## In service of peace

Service has long been a central component of Anabaptist practice. MCC itself was born out of an initiative to serve others facing famine, disease and revolution in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) in 1920. Over the ensuing decades, MCC has embodied peace in practice, with service functioning as a means through which young people further develop their understandings of Anabaptist peace theology and put it into practice. These experiences of service take young people beyond the theoretical to the lived experience of peacemaking.

For this article, five young adults from across the globe, who have participated in service programs associated with MCC, were asked to reflect on what it means to follow Christ's way of peace in their varying contexts. The individuals were participants of MCC's YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) and SALT (Serving and Learning Together) programs, as well as OAASP (the Ohio Amish Anabaptist Service Program), a partner program of the Amish community. Participants who reflected on how their service shaped their understandings of following Christ's way of peace included:

- Lilibeth Guzman Macea, from Colombia, who served with Comisión de Acción Social Menonita (CASM) as a community facilitator in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.



**Jesus teaches a simple message of loving the other, which requires us only to see how human and equal we are. In this sense, peace theology in action is the practice of restorative community alternatives, weaving ideas together, respecting everyone and accepting differences, sharing, and giving ourselves the opportunity to believe in change."**

**—Lilibeth Guzman Macea**

**ff** **Following the path of Christ in my context means to keep His commandments, to love Him with all my heart, with all my might and with all my mind I pray and spend time reading the Bible every morning when I wake up.” —Sina Dy**

- Sina Dy, from Cambodia, who worked as a peacebuilding assistant in the Grassroot Development Initiative in Kisumu, Kenya.
- Ladai Zulu, from Zambia, who served as youth worker and teacher with YES IC, a drop-in center for kids and youth, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- Emery Yoder, from the Old Order Amish community in Ohio, who served with OAASP, an alternative service program developed for conscientious objectors in preparation for the event of a military draft. [OAASP has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Selective Service System of the United States, in which young adults participate in small annual projects that benefit the nation’s health, safety and interests.]
- Katrina Shenk, from the United States, who served with SALT at Casa del Migrante (CdMSG) in Guatemala, providing respite for individuals and families migrating, often without having the opportunity to prepare or plan.

The reflections outlined below demonstrate that following Christ’s way of peace is a daily challenge. “Talking about peace can sometimes be utopian, a peace that is impossible to achieve,” notes Lilibeth. “Perhaps our concept of peace is more focused on the absence of war, but I live it as a whole (*shalom*). I feel it (*shalom*) and have kept it present in the midst of the situations I have experienced this year, because I have been able to sit and listen to women boys and girls with life stories, give words of encouragement, pray, give advice and offer embrace.”

“I have seen how Jesus teaches a simple message of loving the other,” Lilibeth continues, “which requires us only to see how human and equal we are. In this sense, peace theology in action is the practice of restorative community alternatives, weaving ideas together, respecting everyone and accepting differences, sharing and giving ourselves the opportunity to believe in change. Even though our world is full of wars and violence, small acts [of peace] make a difference.”

Sina shared that for her “following the path of Christ in my context means to keep His commandments, to love Him with all my heart, with all my might and with all my mind. I pray and spend time reading the Bible every morning when I wake up. And what God has put in my heart is to serve Him by sharing the gospel, to be humble and to serve the community. This means helping the community, helping reconcile broken relationships and teaching conflict resolution and peacemaking to young people. I do this work because I really want to see my community change and live in peace with love and reconciliation. Through [this work], I am growing more, so I can serve as a channel for healing and reconciliation in a broken and divided world.”

Ladai noted that when one is practicing peace in a different cultural context, “words and body language are relied upon. Priorities are different, therefore there is a need to serve in the community by making connections and communicating in a respectful manner, ensuring that I show kindness and behave appropriately. Being in a Buddhist country [like Cambodia], there is need to be accepting and continue spreading God’s love and peace so as to continue building friendships that reflect peace.”

**ff** **Being a listener, helping others, showing kindness, loving God with a whole heart and allowing that love to spill out to those around are all ways that people can be active practitioners of peace theology, living out Christ’s way of peace.”**

“Practicing peace means showing the community more peaceful ways of handling conflict,” Ladai explained. “In my current work, the focus is healing, as well as teaching self-awareness and anger management. The various clubs help the community youth let go and deal with their anger, which prevents lashing out and passing on the pain in unhealthy ways. My peace theology in action creates change in this community by my showing love to everyone, engaging with the community, getting to know the youth and listening to peoples’ stories.”

Emery described the importance of service as an embodiment of Christ’s way of peace in West Liberty, Kentucky, which had been hit by two tornadoes three days apart with hundreds of homes damaged or destroyed. “Our group worked with Mennonite Disaster Service and Habitat for Humanity, as well as a local organization. We did home repairs and new builds. [Our training] stressed the importance of working together in love and humility. The group had taken Phil. 2:3 for our motto and we were encouraged to memorize it as well. Through the grace of God, the project was an enriching and enjoyable experience.”

Reflecting on her time in Guatemala, Katrina described how she and her coworkers at Casa de Migrantes served migrating people “to the best of our ability and provided a safe place of respite and humanitarian care with empathy, respect and quality. For example, a young mother experiencing a panic attack was able to receive skilled psychological attention. Another young woman expecting her first child went into labor while at CdMSG and was able to receive the support (and hospital connection) she needed. People who have been deported receive accompaniment and psychosocial support as they figure out their next steps. Families and individuals sit down together, enjoy a hot meal, receive clothing and a hygiene kit, shower, sleep, get information about travel routes, and renew their strength to continue their plan of mobility after breakfast. I am proud of and grateful for the good work that happens at CdMSG and the way we get to experience and share the love of God with those who come and go. The kingdom of God is being lived at CdMSG.”

While the work can feel daunting, Katrina expressed thanks for the people who have taught her “how to walk with Christ and carry hope in the contexts we are living. This is a journey that is blessed, always shared, challenging and adorned with signs of beauty and hope and reasons to continue moving forward in the midst of sorrow.” Helping others with empathy and respect demonstrates God’s love and care and brings a portion of God’s peace to each individual.

The reflections offered by these young adults about their service testify to how Christ’s way of peace is embodied in daily action. Being a listener, helping others, showing kindness, loving God with a whole heart and allowing that love to spill out to those around are all ways that people can be active practitioners of peace theology, living out Christ’s way of peace.

*Darlene M. Hein is MCC U.S. administrative services receptionist. She lives in Landisville, Pennsylvania.*

 **Helping others with empathy and respect demonstrates God’s love and care and brings a portion of God’s peace to each individual.”**

## Gilgal Mission Trust: a sign of God's *shalom* for Dalit and Tribal communities

Gilgal Mission Trust (GMT) is a nonprofit organization situated in the Coimbatore District of Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, in India, that works to foster holistic growth for downtrodden communities by enabling them to be treated as citizens of India. GMT's vision is "Life with dignity to all." GMT describes its mission thus: "To serve God amid the community and to support local churches in worship and in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom in their teaching, baptizing and nurturing believers. [GMT] responds to human need through loving service, seeking the transformation of unjust structures in society and sustaining and renewing life for the people."

 **The church leaders took important steps to talk with both families, constantly counseling them and sharing the word of God with them. At first, the families were not willing to accept them. But the church understood that they had been given the ministry of reconciliation from God (2 Corinthians 5:18)."**

GMT has worked among the Dalit and Tribal communities since the year 2010, in partnership with MCC India. This partnership has enabled peacebuilding work among communities and churches who are socially, economically and physically strained by the caste system. GMT is committed to stand with the people in their suffering and challenges, believing that God calls the church to care for those who are suffering, suppressed and sidelined, and to strive for justice. While the work of mitigating conflict is complex, GMT's initiatives of peace training, equipping church leaders for peacebuilding and creating Peace Promoter Teams (PPT) in every village help reduce violence dramatically.

GMT's peacebuilding projects promote social harmony through community-based peace initiatives among economically marginalized Dalit and Tribal communities in alignment with the peacebuilding theology of the church. They impact individuals' lives, churches and the society at large. A testimonial from one GMT initiative highlights the impact of its peacebuilding work.

Punitha (age 24), a Dalit woman, and Murugesan (aged 28), a high caste man from a neighboring village, fell in love in their workplace and proposed to marry. Being from different castes, the parents and the community leaders opposed their intention. Despite this family and community opposition, Punitha and Murugesan got married and were excommunicated from their families and society. The church became their place of refuge at this time of life-threatening challenge for their living. In turn, the church and its leaders were also threatened and attacked. The issue grew, creating division among the members of the church community based on their caste. In response, the church worked to bring different family members and community people to the table. They met with them in their homes, offered counsel and taught reconciliation, peacebuilding and acceptance of different perspectives. It took almost a year of hard work for the church to bring everyone to a common table.

The church leaders took important steps to talk with both families, constantly counseling them and sharing the word of God with them. At first, the families were not willing to accept them. But the church understood that they had been given the ministry of reconciliation by God (2 Corinthians 5:18). To continue this challenging work, church leaders needed to maintain a consistent prayer life, with prayer sustaining their ongoing teaching of forgiveness.

Eventually, the Murugesan family accepted the word of God and slowly began to transform. The family, who were high caste, began to understand and accept the family members of Punitha and the church. Through this experience, the church impacted their lives by bringing these two communities together to overcome the major division in the church.

Furthermore, the church invited Punitha to become an agent of peacebuilding through its women's empowerment project. Punitha joined GMT's tailoring and embroidery skill training school and received her certification. Gilgal Mission Church gifted her a sewing machine to start her own tailoring shop. She decided to provide free stitching services from her tailoring shop to the elderly and needy women for all communities (Dalit and high caste) to help those villagers who could not pay. This action brought respect and honor from the villages, irrespective of caste identity. As Punitha became a recognized woman, she became more accepted. Her family became a model family, while Punitha witnessed to the Lord Jesus Christ among her neighbors through her business and life.

Gilgal Mission Trust's peacebuilding projects that work with women like Punitha have been a double blessing, helping families overcome the challenges of a harmful caste system and become a light in their communities. The church is called to be an agent of peace. GMT churches are committed to be God's hand and mouth in bringing God's *shalom* and always bringing a message of peace and justice for all people. GMT's effort is just a drop in the ocean, but we are encouraged that we are not alone in this mission. MCC India has supported GMT's mission of peace and reconciliation by equipping the church and communities with necessary skills and promoting peace to create a ripple of peace in the society. The church is making a great impact through these peacebuilding efforts. This is Christ's way of peace, that the church becomes a light to the surrounding society wherever it exists.

*Paul Pinehas is president of Gilgal Mission Trust. He lives in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.*



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In this photo from 2012 (from left), Savia Tete, Caesaer Hakim and Betty Dudu, members of the Opari Peace Committee in Magwi County, Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan, gathered for a meeting. MCC partner, the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), established peace committees in ten communities in Sudan and South Sudan during this period. The committees received trainings on skills to resolve their problems at the community level so that they could live in peace and harmony. (MCC photo/Nina Linton)

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