

Intersections

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MCC and Mennonite World Conference (MWC)

2 More blessed to give than to receive: the 100-year relationship of MWC and MCC
by César García

4 Made of the same cloth: MCC and MWC support each other's mission by Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger

6 Synergies in mission: the MWC-MCC relationship
by Ronald J.R. Mathies

10 I am because we are
by Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle

12 YAMEN: a picture of the global church by Carolina Pérez Cano

14 MWC and MCC as partners in mission in South Asia
interview with Cynthia Peacock

17 MCC and European Mennonites: a history of collaboration and fellowship
by Henk Stenvers

19 MCC, MWC and the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso by Saika Traoré

21 MCC, MWC and Anabaptist churches collaborating in mission in the Andean region of South America by Paul Stucky

Mennonite Central Committee's tagline encapsulation of the organization's mission names three types of work: *relief*, *development* and *peace*, all carried out in the name of Christ. Yet over more than one hundred years, MCC has undertaken an additional type of work, work flowing through and alongside relief, development and peace, namely, the ongoing fostering of inter-Mennonite connections through practical ecumenical efforts. MCC's founding in 1920 to respond to the call from Mennonites in southern Russia (now Ukraine) for aid in the face of war and famine brought together church groups that harbored deep suspicions of one another but who overcome fears about collaboration to join in the practical work of feeding hungry people as Jesus had called his disciples to do. Over the ensuing decades, MCC has continued to generate and channel practical ecumenical energy among Anabaptists, both in Canada and the United States and across the globe, even as commitment from some Anabaptist groups to the practical ecumenical venture embodied by MCC has at times faltered.

In 1925, five years after MCC's establishment, another inter-Mennonite venture came into being: Mennonite World Conference (MWC), a global fellowship of varied Mennonite and Brethren in Christ national church groupings. What began initially as a gathering of churches primarily from Europe, Canada and the United States has grown over the ensuing decades into a body that today includes 110 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ national churches from 61 countries, with around 1.45 million baptized believers in close to 10,180 congregations. This year, MWC marks its centennial, one hundred years of inter-Anabaptist fellowship, while the global church also commemorates 500 years of the Anabaptist movement.

From their beginnings and at their core, both MCC and MWC were and are inter-Anabaptist movements striving to encourage ecumenical fellowship and practical collaboration among Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and other groups emerging from the Anabaptist movement. That MCC and MWC have been intertwined in their work and witness over the past century should not come as no surprise. The articles in this issue of *Intersections* examine the past, present and future of this MCC-MWC collaboration, with Anabaptist leaders from around the world reflecting on the joys and challenges of and opportunities for this collaboration.

Alain Epp Weaver directs planning and learning for MCC.

More blessed to give than to receive: the 100-year relationship between MWC and MCC

“The hand that gives is always uppermost; the hand that receives is always lower.”—African proverb

“ Giving is an essential part of human dignity, of being created in God’s image.”

A Congolese pastor reshaped my understanding of giving and receiving. The last time I saw her was at the Global Assembly of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) in Paraguay in 2009, where she expressed gratitude to my wife and me for the financial support our local congregation in Colombia had given her and her church in Congo. I had first met her and her husband during a visit to Kinshasa in 2007. At that time, my local congregation in Colombia was seven years old. Because we were growing, we faced the challenges of not having a place to worship and the enormous financial needs of our church planting project. Back in Kinshasa, I was invited to preach on a Sunday morning in the church of that couple who would become my friends. Like my church in Colombia, this congregation did not have a building. Their church met in a tent with no walls. In that context of extreme poverty, I was blessed by having lunch after the service. I realized later that the church members had sacrificed their lunch to provide my lunch.

When I got back to Bogotá, the call to support that congregation was clear, even more so when we received news of the husband’s death, leaving behind his children and his wife, who became the senior pastor of the church. My local congregation decided to raise funds for the church in Kinshasa and for part of the educational needs of the pastor’s children. We knew that we would not advance in our church-building project by doing so, but the Congolese church became a higher priority for us than ourselves.

Some colleagues in Colombia could not understand how my local congregation, having such immense financial needs, was sending money to support a church in Congo. We were accustomed only to receiving. For over 60 years, Colombian churches had received foreign support for many endeavours: disaster responses, church planting, peace work, education and social development. Even today, the needs in Colombia keep growing!

“ Helping others in a way that they can in turn give is vital, restoring dignity through projects shaped by love and justice.”

Giving, however, is a foundational aspect of human beings. Giving is an integral dimension of being created in God’s image. We know financial aid in the form of charity can humiliate the recipient. It can create dependency, reinforcing rather than breaking the cycle of deprivation. Being created in God’s image implies being self-sufficient and interdependent. The highest form of aid enables the individual to become a source of support for others. Humanitarian relief is essential in the short term, but, as we see in the Bible, in the long run even a person dependent on the support of others must give support to others. Giving is an essential part of human dignity.

During its 100-year relationship with MWC, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has nurtured and strengthened our global Anabaptist church by offering support to regional churches and local congregations in times of war, natural disasters, displacement and poverty. Today, many regional churches and local congregations are developing the capacity, the necessary values and convictions to create structures that can do the same, using their local resources to support others near and far. These churches can learn from MCC's experience, following MCC's best practices, avoiding mistakes made in the past while learning about service values and the importance of good planning and management.

MCC has a leadership role that can be directed towards teaching how to be a source of support to others. Helping others in a way that they can in turn give is vital, restoring dignity through projects shaped by love and justice. Anabaptist churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America are reaching beyond themselves in mission, including through relief, development and peacebuilding. Around 50 Anabaptist service agencies and church commissions carry out our global church's mission efforts. Yet more remains to be done in activating the church's potential for ministries of relief, development and peacebuilding. More than half of the national Anabaptist church conferences belonging to MWC have not yet developed such service agencies or other structures to extend Christ's love through practical ministries of relief, development and peacebuilding. The risk of dependency still exists.

Can we imagine a future in which each national church is actively involved in giving local support to help others in need? Can we strategize together to accompany the poor to support others? Can we intentionally plan how to help churches that have historically only received in becoming donors and gift-givers? As we move into the second century of the relationship between MCC and MWC, I hope we can dream together about these questions.

My local congregation in Colombia never did construct the church building we wanted. However, the lives of our members were transformed by the blessing of giving. In addition to the support we sent to Congo, we started a scholarship project to educate children in Colombia's three areas of extreme poverty. Dozens of children received support for several years. We contributed to the financial support of Colombian missionaries and service workers ministering in other countries. We learned through experience the truth of Jesus's words quoted by Paul in Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (NRSVue). Over the next century of partnership between MWC and MCC, may we collaborate to see more and more churches worldwide standing together to support others who need to experience God's love as they themselves have received it.

César García, originally from Bogotá, Colombia, is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. His appointment in 2012 marked the first time a leader from the Global South had served in this leadership role. He has been a church planter, pastor and professor of Bible and theology. Prior to his election, García was chair of the Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia (Mennonite Brethren Churches of Colombia) and secretary of the MWC Mission Commission.



García, César. *What is God's Kingdom and What Does Citizenship Look Like?* Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2021.

“ Over the next century of partnership between MWC and MCC, may we collaborate to see more and more churches worldwide standing up together to support others who need to experience God's love as they have done so.”

Made of the same cloth: MCC and MWC support each other's mission

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"Made of the same cloth." This is the phrase used by former MCC leader Ron Mathies to describe Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). At the same time, although MCC and MWC are made of the same cloth—the fabric of Anabaptist peoplehood—we are woven into different garments for different purposes.

MWC is called to be a communion (*koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service and witness. MWC exists to:

- be a global community of faith in the Anabaptist-tradition;
- facilitate relationships among Anabaptist-related churches worldwide; and
- relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.

MCC, meanwhile, is a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, owned by Anabaptist churches in Canada and the United States, working in partnership with Anabaptist churches and other partners around the world, 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.

MCC and MWC collaborate because there is synergy in witnessing to and in building God's kingdom. Both MWC and MCC are committed to nurturing relationships with Anabaptist churches around the world, to compassionate service through the church and as an arm of the church with a global worldview and a global reach. Both MWC and MCC understand the church to be the primary vehicle called by God to share and live out the good news of God's redemption of humanity and all of creation through Jesus. MCC is commissioned to function as an expression of the church in responding to the needs of the world. MWC works at its broader mandate to nurture fellowship within the global church and to build up the church and its ministries. Given that MCC is accountable to churches in Canada and the U.S. that belong to MWC and given that MCC accompanies MWC members churches globally in ministries of relief, development and building, MCC's decision to adopt the Shared Convictions articulated by MWC as MCC's statement of faith was natural and appropriate.

MCC and MWC commit to engaging with each other in continuing and deepening their relationship. This relationship includes participation in each other's celebrations, gatherings and governance meetings. MWC and MCC senior leaders meet frequently and share reports about their work with one another. MWC appoints a representative from the Global South to participate actively on the MCC joint ministry council which brings together MCC Canada and MCC U.S. leaders and to attend joint MCC Canada and MCC U.S. board meetings. MCC representatives, meanwhile, attend MWC executive committee meetings as a member of the MWC advisory committee.

Complexities in the relationship between MWC and MCC can create opportunities and synergies as well as challenges. One of the challenges is that MCC, whose primary identity is as "a worldwide ministry of Ana-

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baptist churches,” is also a medium-sized relief and development NGO operating within an environment of international NGOs and global funding agencies with their own culture and standards. On a day-to-day basis, it can be easy for MCC to prioritize the approaches and standards of that INGO community over the goals of MWC within a given country or regional context. Conversely, the expectations of MWC member churches in some locations that their projects will be treated as privileged with regards to planning and reporting rigor because we are “brothers and sisters” within the global Anabaptist fellowship presents another challenge.

In addition to financial contributions to MWC’s core budget, its Global Anabaptist Service Network and Global Anabaptist Peace Network and its regional representative travel fund, MCC supports MWC in nurturing new generations of young Anabaptist leaders by administering the joint MWC-MCC young adult service program YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network), in which Christian young adults in the Global South serve for a year with an MCC partner church or organization also in the Global South. In this South-South exchange program, either the sending church or the receiving organization must be Anabaptist. The article by Carolina Pérez Cano in this issue of *Intersections* discusses the impact YAMEN has had and continues to have in building up new leadership for Anabaptist churches globally.

To foster clarity in their relationship, MCC and MWC regularly review and update a memorandum of understanding that details their respective roles and guides their cooperation and mutual commitments. Highlights from this MOU include:

- MWC and MCC both carry their own relationships with MWC member churches.
- MCC and MWC will both encourage a commitment to service in MWC member churches around the world, which may result in the development of Anabaptist service entities within member churches in their national contexts around the world.
- MCC will support MWC in the development of Anabaptist service around the world.
- MCC is committed to engaging Anabaptist churches in the nearly 30 countries where MCC operates where Anabaptist churches are also present. When conditions warrant, this engagement can include partnering in relief, development and peacebuilding with Anabaptist church agencies.
- Because of MCC’s experience in working with grants and projects, MWC will include an MCC advisor (appointed by the MCC Canada and MCC U.S. executive directors) to the MWC deacons commission to assist in its decisions about allocations from the Global Church Sharing Fund.
- When the MWC deacons commission visits a country where MCC is present, MWC will connect with MCC at the program or executive director level and extend an invitation to MCC to accompany the visit.
- MCC is committed to building and nurturing relationships with Anabaptist churches in the contexts where it operates. MCC will seek to work with national Anabaptist churches to develop MOUs that name the ways that MCC and national Anabaptist churches will relate to one another.



“MCC and the Church: Together in Mission.” Available here: <https://mcc.org/media/document/127485>.

“Principles and Practices: Guiding the Mission of Mennonite Central Committee in the Name of Christ.” 2011. Available here: <https://mcc.org/media/document/127481>.

“Shared Convictions” Adopted by the Mennonite World Conference general council, March 15, 2006. Available here: <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/shared-convictions/>.

- MWC member churches will be invited by MCC to send church representatives to participate in MCC country advisory committees and to contribute their perspectives on MCC program reviews and leadership appraisals.
- MWC's regional representatives and MCC's program leaders globally will be intentional about maintaining good communication and relationships with each other.

Not only are MCC and MWC made of the same Anabaptist cloth and committed to God's primary way of working in the world (through the church), the relationship between MWC and MCC makes each of us stronger.

Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger are executive directors for MCC Canada and MCC U.S., respectively.

Synergies in mission: the MWC/MCC relationship

This article, reprinted with permission of the author and Cascadia Publishing House, consists of condensed excerpts from a longer article of the same title in A Table of Sharing (Telford, PA: Cascadia 2011). Editorial additions marked by brackets.

The Mennonite World Conference (MWC)-Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relationship being charted here (past, present, future) suggests a continuum across counsel, coordination, cooperation, collaboration and, potentially, consolidation. Both MWC and MCC have been around for almost one-fifth of Anabaptism's five-century history. Over the ensuing pages, I will outline three key components of the MWC-MCC relationship: 1) relationship builders, i.e., factors which have contributed to strengthened connection between MCC and MWC; 2) relationship complexities, criticisms, constraints and concerns; and 3) potential future relationship considerations.

Relationship builders: Multiple elements have contributed to a movement toward closer connection between MWC and MCC over the decades. For example, the defined purposes of each organization, as articulated in their statements of identity, vision and mission, have played key roles in the relationship between them. For examples, MWC's identity, vision and mission statements have placed a strong emphasis on inter-Mennonite solidarity. The 1937 MCC Articles of Incorporation, meanwhile, articulated how MCC had already functioned over the previous seventeen years, namely, "as a charitable organization in the relief of human suffering and distress and in aiding, rehabilitating and reestablishing Mennonite *and other* [emphasis added] refugees." From its inception a key component of MCC's mission has been inter-Mennonite collaboration and assistance.

Orie Miller enunciated the twin foci of MCC's mission: first, MCC promotes mutual sharing within the Christian community (household of faith, Galatians 6:10); and second, through such sharing "light, life and healing can flow to all of needy mankind." On the occasion of MCC's fiftieth anniversary, scholars noted the support MCC had given to various Mennonite church efforts globally, including the establishment of theological

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schools in Uruguay, Switzerland and Indonesia, a variety of publishing efforts, exchanges for young people and renewed Mennonite interaction on issues of peace.

Mennonite World Conference assemblies have provided fertile ground for a relationship with MCC. MCC jointly sponsored the 1930 [MWC] Danzig gathering, together with Dutch and German Mennonite organizations, a gathering focused exclusively on the theme of relief efforts, past and present. MWC requested that MCC take the initiative and invite the MWC to meet in the USA in 1948 and to accept the responsibility to organize, implement and collect funds for the assembly. MCC organized all aspects of the assembly program, sent out invitations to international guests and oversaw all logistical details in Goshen, Indiana, and North Newton, Kansas, the two assembly venues. The assembly examined the plight after the war during the Goshen part of its meetings and attempted to reconcile the choices made by Mennonites in different countries during the North Newton gathering. This two-stage assembly represented the “largest single undertaking of the MCC in international relations.” [MCC would go on to provide financial and personnel support to ensuing MWC assemblies and gatherings up to the present.]

The MWC-MCC relationships consists of the people who make up the community of faith who nurture the relationship. But this broad, all-encompassing category, today numbering in the millions, can be broken down into three progressively narrower groupings. The first sub-group consists of the hundreds of thousands of governance board members, paid staffers, service workers and informal volunteers who have participated in and shaped the activities of the two organizations. The second grouping consists of key people who have given leadership in both of the organizations: in MCC’s first six decades, H.S. Bender, C.J. Dyck, Ray Schlichting and Robert Kreider actively served in MWC alongside MCC [Over the ensuing decades, many more MCC board, staff and alumni also contributed to MWC’s work.] At his retirement from the MWC treasurer position, longtime MCC leader Reg Toews quipped, “MWC is the hospital rehabilitation of MCCers.” But one person, more than any other, personifies the MWC-MCC relationship. While Christian Neff is often viewed as the father of MWC, MWC’s current organizational shape has arguably “been shaped more by Harold S. Bender than any other person,” [as he] rallied the community of faith behind his “Anabaptist Vision” as the theological vision for Mennonite organization in the twentieth century.

MCC has provided significant financial support to MWC’s programs over the past decades. Beginning in 1952, MCC has assisted with travel funds for representatives from the Global South. On occasion, MCC has extended loans to MWC. MCC supported the International Mennonite Peace Committee, which later became the Peace Council of MWC, with a regular grant from 1972 until 2007. In 1995, to mark its seventy-fifth anniversary, MCC presented a US\$600,000 “jubilee” gift to MWC with no strings attached so that MWC could establish a Church Sharing Fund to support denominational and congregational programs around the world.

Between 2001 and 2008, MCC designated just over US\$1 million to a wide variety of MWC programs and initiatives, including MWC’s General Fund, the YAMEN! youth exchange program, Global Mission Fellowship, Global History Project, International Planning Commission, Zimbabwe Koinonia delegation, Service Consultation, Congo Forum and the Global Youth Summit.

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Learn
more

Kreider, Robert S. and Mathies, Ronald J.R. *Unity amidst Diversity: Mennonite Central Committee at 75*. Akron, PA: MCC, 1995.

Mathies, Ronald J.R. "Synergies in Mission: The MWC/MCC Relationship." In *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*. Ed. Alain Epp Weaver, 84–102. Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011.

“ From MCC’s and MWC’s earliest days, some Mennonites have harbored suspicions of inter-Mennonite efforts. In some cases, fears of ‘modernizing’ dimensions of ecumenism fueled these suspicions. Other persons, meanwhile, questioned whether inter-Mennonite efforts were sufficiently ‘spiritual.’ ”

While MWC has deeply appreciated MCC support, this assistance has not been without its critics, with some within MWC worrying that the amount of MCC’s assistance threatens to overwhelm MWC and render it dependent on MCC’s support, some concerned that increased levels of support to MWC could move MCC away from broader ecumenical and interfaith partnerships and some distressed that projects implemented by MWC are often administered outside of MCC’s program planning system for international development programs and are thus not held to the same standards of accountability and scrutiny as other projects.

Relationship complexities, criticism, constraints and concerns: From MCC’s and MWC’s earliest days, some Mennonites have harbored suspicions of inter-Mennonite efforts. In some cases, fears of ‘modernizing’ dimensions of ecumenism fueled these suspicions. Other persons, meanwhile, questioned whether inter-Mennonite efforts were sufficiently ‘spiritual.’ At the 1948 MWC assembly, for example, MCC leaders Orié Miller and Harold Bender attended not as members of their denomination (the “Old” Mennonite Church, which had reservations about the type of ecumenical movement MWC represented) but instead only as members of MCC.

Today, meanwhile, some MWC governance people question whether MCC’s constituents in Canada and the United States are prepared to take the relationship seriously. At the same time, however, various denominations have voiced concerns about MCC potentially overstepping its mandate with respect to Mennonite denominations in Canada and the United States in furthering the MWC-MCC relationship. Accordingly, North American Mennonite leaders have expressed considerable caution about the potential blurring of identities of the two organizations: this concern was voiced at the 1964 MWC Executive Committee meeting as the worry that North American Mennonite churches would not approve of “mingling the spiritual dimensions of MWC and the material dimensions of MCC.” Thus, for the past several decades, the default position has been to approve joint collaboration on particular projects but not structural mixing.

Some MWC and MCC governance voices have also cautioned against blurring organizational identities. One executive member of MCC summarized this concern: “There needs to be a clear recognition that we are two different bodies that work with a different mandate. MCC’s mandates comes from a North American constituency, most of which does not understand the relationship.” MWC, for its part, has raised concerns about MCC’s program priorities. Does MCC work enough with the church, in particular Mennonite churches? At the same time, however, some in MWC have questioned whether MWC member churches really want to become involved in the ownership of MCC.

Future directions: In Ethiopia in summer 2010, MWC convened a consultation of Anabaptist-Mennonite service agencies to discern possibilities for collaboration and joint action in the future. MCC agreed with the other agencies to work together to build a space for collaboration and information sharing under MWC auspices. As MWC and MCC change, they will need one another. Interviewees suggested that MWC’s future depends on MCC’s creativity in assisting MWC to change into a more dynamic and responsive body, while other interviewees claim that MCC needs MWC to move beyond an artificial separation of service and evangelism.



Quib Gloria Noemi sands a desk in 2020 at Jose Maria Castilla School in Guatemala City as part of the MCC-supported *Semana de Servicio*, a youth service camp for youth from Mennonite churches in Guatemala and El Salvador. (MCC photo/Meghan Mast)

Interviewees [for this article] raised many questions about how the MCC-MWC relationship will evolve. Questions for MCC included these: Is MWC a stakeholder, partner, a part-owner or the owner of MCC? Will MCC try to be a more effective NGO or will it serve the church? Should the locus of MCC's program priority be the 'household of faith' or the wider ecumenical, and even inter-faith, community? Or must these two dimensions of work stand in opposition to one another? For MWC, key questions include these: Will MWC's "Communion/Community" model be relational or programmatic in character? Will MWC member churches be able to develop organizational capacity in order faithfully and effectively to carry out diaconal ministries be it through partnership with MCC or by other means? And for both organizations, the broad question remains open: Which constituency will decide these questions and by what mechanism?

MCC was founded as, is currently and should remain as an arm of the church. While this is presently most visible (to its supporting constituency) in North America, it has always been thus internationally. If MCC is to continue to be an arm of the church, it is critical that MCC's relationship with and accountability to the global church be strengthened. Absent that clear vision and identity, MCC would quickly move toward a parachurch institution at best and beg the question of its very existence.

MCC has been clear over the years that its accountability in the first instance is to the supporting faith community. Over time, this accountability has been increasingly shared with the people in the countries in which MCC does programming: MCC is not only accountable to constituents who give of their money, material goods and time, but is also accountable to the organizations worldwide with which MCC works and to the program participants in whose interest MCC and its partners operate.

MCC has played a vital role in MWC from its origins. MCC has often provided the infrastructure for MWC's operational reality. But MCC also gains symbolically and in purpose, increasingly, from MWC's global churchly mandate. The current effectiveness of MCC would be diminished

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and the opportunity cost immense if [the MWC-MCC] relationship did not stay on course. The immediate future steps in this decades-long relationship may not be clear. Yet the overall direction should be evident, one of moving toward new forms of partnership between MWC and MCC, member churches and church-related agencies.

Ronald J.R. Mathies served as executive director for MCC binational from 1996 through 2005.

I am because we are

“We exist as a global community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition to facilitate relationships between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide and to relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.”

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) is a community of Anabaptist related churches, working on behalf and for the sake of these churches. We exist as a global community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition to facilitate relationships between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide and to relate to other Christian world communions and organizations. Much of the work we do at MWC through our different commissions addresses matters of vital concern facing both our church communities and beyond. The deacons commission, which I chair, is one of the four MWC commissions that listens to the needs of the global Anabaptist church communion, offering encouragement, prayer and support to MWC member churches who yearn for Anabaptist churches globally to “walk with them” in their particular needs.

Walking with member churches includes visitation. We visit member churches upon their request. The purpose of these diaconal visits is primarily to listen to and to share, pray and worship with the church. Through diaconal visits, the witness of MWC member churches is strengthened as connections to the global Anabaptist fellowship are deepened. We serve churches through prayer, working with regional representatives to receive prayer requests. Through the Global Church Sharing Fund (supported by MCC), MWC accompanies churches in their ministries both within and beyond the church, supporting them financially through the Global Church Sharing Fund (GCSF). MWC welcomes counsel from MCC when making decisions about allocating funds from the GCSF and seeks whenever possible to coordinate and partner with Anabaptist service agencies. Through the GCSF, we encourage our churches to reach out to their local communities, recognizing that understanding and addressing others’ needs requires both cognitive effort and spiritual discernment.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, the apostle Paul writes: “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing” (NRSV). These words are an exhortation to the whole church of Thessalonica to comfort and edify one another. Paul’s words highlight that in works of charity we are called to mutuality and to come alongside to help, strengthen and support. As siblings in Jesus, Christians are meant to support, edify and stand for each other as we all build up one another. As we proclaim Jesus’s resurrection, look forward to his return and share the good news of freedom, liberation and light in Jesus, we are called in the present to encourage one another. We need each other.

The African philosophy of *ubuntu*—“I am because we are”—captures beautifully the calling of Christians to offer encouragement to one another, highlighting that a person’s humanity is shaped and sustained through rela-

“MWC welcomes counsel from MCC when making decisions about allocating funds from the GCSF and seeks whenever possible to coordinate and partner with Anabaptist service agencies.”

relationship with each other. As members of the body of Christ, we are one, yet we are also different, with different access to resources, challenges, blessings and gifts. The GCSF is one concrete way through which the MWC deacons commission shares gifts and encouragement across the global church. Through the GCSF, MWC walks alongside our member churches, encouraging mutual aid within as well as outreach beyond the church's walls by the global Anabaptist fellowship. The GCSF both fosters mutual aid among Anabaptist churches and extends outreach to surrounding communities. Through the GCSF, churches who have financial resources share with churches who need them, in recognition that Christ's body is marked by mutual caring and support. With the global Anabaptist church fellowship, we reach out to support and stand with each other in times of need.

The GCSF serves as a platform to help churches in case of emergencies, be those war or other disasters. The GCSF also supports church building projects, training pastors and members on Anabaptist theology, peace initiatives from churches and events like the recent celebration of the centennial of Anabaptism in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Upcoming events, such as regional celebrations of 500 years of the Anabaptist movement, align with MWC's pillar of fellowship. The fund also organizes mission training and outreach efforts to unreached people groups. In these varied ways, God is using the GCSF to make a difference in our life together as a global Anabaptist family.

Of course, this work comes with challenges. The need often exceeds the available money in the GCSF, requiring us to undertake the difficult work of prioritizing requests. Despite the challenges, I find great joy whenever we approve an allocation from the GCSF to support churches as they seek to strengthen their work and witness. The GCSF is a concrete way by which MWC brings scripture to life, making it tangible among us: in these moments, we truly embody the essence of being a global Anabaptist family.

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle is the deacons commission secretary for Mennonite World Conference. She is a youth mentor and coach, a member of Dehub Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia and author of Mewetacha [The Ladder: A Dream Connector].



“As members of the body of Christ, we are one, yet we are also different, with different access to resources, challenges, blessings and gifts.”

Students enter their classroom to receive school kits provided by MCC and the Meserete Kristos Church Development Commission at Daero Tekli Elementary School in Ethiopia's Tigray region in September 2024. Many children in Tigray had been out of school for three to four years because of a civil war in Ethiopia from 2020 to 2022 that unfolded predominantly in the Tigray region. Many schools were destroyed and looted. As schools reopened in September 2023 and 2024, registration was lower than expected, partially due to families' inability to provide educational materials for their children. The school kit distribution contributed to students' ability to go to school. (MCC/Arete photo)

YAMEN: a picture of the global church

“YAMEN is an opportunity to experience the complexity and richness of the global church.”

This service experience, without a doubt, was a beautiful gift. I discovered that I longed to continue growing and serving. Upon returning [from my service assignment], I realized that my place was at home, with my faith community, but my heart burned to return to the Indigenous Mayan Popti' communities where I had spent my time of service. I felt that I had found a place where I could continue to be part of building the kingdom of God.
—Febe Madrigal, YAMEN participant from Nicaragua, Jacaltenango Huehuetenango, Guatemala, 2022–2023

At first glance, MCC's YAMEN program (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network), operated on behalf of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), could be understood as a volunteer and multicultural exchange program. However, if we see YAMEN as a space for young people who, with curiosity, a calling to service and a burning desire to put into practice their gifts and professional skills, seek to be part of building the kingdom of God in different parts of the world, then YAMEN becomes an opportunity to experience the complexity and richness of the global church.

Most of the countries where the YAMEN program operates are facing different crises: war, mass displacement, economic catastrophe, the devastating impact of the climate crisis and combinations of these different challenges. Anabaptist churches worship and witness within these contexts with an eagerness to respond to and generate changes in their immediate contexts, bringing a message of peace in the midst of the violence that surrounds them.

In some contexts, churches fight so that their young people are not recruited by armed groups. Other communities strive to pass on their knowledge of the land to younger generations so that young people do not leave the countryside. Anabaptist churches in these contexts view MCC programs like YAMEN, IVEP and Seed as opportunities for their young people to build connections to and gain knowledge from the global Anabaptist church and the broader world that they can bring back to their communities.

At the YAMEN orientation in 2024, I rejoiced to meet several young people who in their countries conscientiously object to military service. I met young people dedicating themselves to bettering their communities through agriculture, music, art, teaching, accounting, administration and engineering. YAMENers' diverse skills invite us to think about how rich the global church is. The global church consists of congregations in both urban and rural communities, with these different church communities teaching us new ways of looking at Anabaptism and showing us new ways to embody the call to peacebuilding in contexts where people are confronted with neglect by or even violence from the state.

For church communities to send their young people away for a year of service in one of MCC's exchange programs is a major step. For a young leader in a congregation to be absent for a year or more of service requires adjustment. Yet that adjustment can become an opportunity to develop new leadership skills. After young adult participants in YAMEN expand their thinking and gain knowledge beyond their borders, they return to their home communities to share with them new ways of being the body of Christ.

“For church communities to send their young people away for a year of service in one of MCC's exchange programs is a major step.”



The 2024–2025 class of YAMEN and SALT participants take a group photo together outside of the MCC Cambodia office in Phnom Penh. September 2024. (MCC photo/Charles Conklin)

A few years ago, a congregation sent one of its young people to YAMEN, a person with many gifts used in the congregation’s worship team and Sunday school. For the church, the departure of this young person for a year of YAMEN service meant a temporary loss, but with the certainty and pride of being represented by that young person in a different country. This young man, coming from a village with a population of approximately 800 people, went around the world to share his values, culture and way of being church he had learned in his home congregation. Through his YAMEN journey, he not only found opportunities to make visible the strengths and adversities of his home community, but then also to share the similarities and differences of his temporary home.

The experience for each YAMEN participant is so profound that often the return to their countries is challenging, with some of them struggling to find their place as they readjust to their own cultures. For the sending churches, the return of YAMEN participants can be challenging as they see how their young people have changed through the year of service. Sending church communities can sometimes feel like the YAMENER has changed so much that they are almost “lost,” with their new perspectives challenging the church’s traditional ways of operating.

Remember this . . . But if he plants plenty of seeds, he will get a big harvest. (2 Corinthians 9:6b, EASY). While service through YAMEN can bring challenges, it can also be understood as planting a seed for the future of local congregations, the global church and MCC. At the end of the service year,

Learn
more

More information on YAMEN, the joint MWC-MCC service exchange program, see here: <https://mcc.org/get-involved/volunteer/yamen>.

the seeds that were planted have flourished in new, sometimes unexpected, ways, with young people then bringing back new gifts, ideas and hopes for their home churches and communities.

In talking with former YAMEN participants, I have learned much about how YAMEN shapes and transforms their understandings of church. Malin Yem, who served in Haiti during the 2018–2019 year, returned to Cambodia to serve as an assistant pastor, incorporating her learnings from her service year into her ministry. “For me, YAMEN taught me other ways to worship, other ways to be church, and that changed the way I think and how I see the world,” she shared.

Over the course of YAMEN’s history, many young people’s leadership, ministerial and professional skills have been strengthened, along with their interpersonal and cultural skills. Febe Madrigal from Nicaragua explains the transformative nature of her YAMEN year in Jacaltenango Huehuetenango, Guatemala like this: “The experience transformed me. Living with people from different cultures and immersion in a new environment were molding my way of being, I rebuilt myself and learned a lot. I discovered facets of leadership that I did not know I had in me, along with a responsibility that made me feel closer to God and my neighbor.”

For over two decades, the YAMEN experience has helped many young people discern their vocations and has expanded their vision for how they can contribute to the church in their home contexts. At the same time, YAMENers have expanded the vision of the churches where they have served, opening a window onto the richness of the global church.

Carolina Pérez Cano coordinates MCC’s YAMEN and Seed young adult service programs. She lives in Bogotá, Colombia.

MCC and MWC as partners in mission in South Asia

“Fellowship and the work of relief, development and peace are interconnected: we deepen our understanding of the global church and then we go out into the world the share and serve.”

One way that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC) are interconnected is through people who have given leadership in both organizations over the decades. One such person is Cynthia Peacock, who worked for MCC in a variety of roles for 38 years, retiring in 2006. After that, Peacock became the chair of MWC’s deacons commission, overseeing the Global Church Sharing Fund, and then later started serving as MWC regional representative for South Asia, a role she still holds. Peacock also serves on the MCC India advisory committee. This past July, Peacock answered questions about her experience with both MCC and MWC.

How would you describe the distinct missions of MCC and MWC? MCC works with all people, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, working with community-based organizations to bring about change and transformation both through and beyond the four walls of the church. MWC’s ministry, however, is to build relationships among Anabaptist churches, linking them to one another, in turn deepening everyone’s understanding of the church as a global communion that stands together in times of joy and sorrow.

How do the missions of MCC and MWC converge? MCC is the service arm of the church, collaborating with Anabaptist churches globally on relief, development and peace ministries. Through these partnerships, MCC provides help to people in need regardless of their backgrounds. MWC, meanwhile, equips churches by working to foster unity across the global Anabaptist communion. Fellowship and the work of relief, development and peace are interconnected: we deepen our understanding of the global church and then we go out into the world to share and serve.

As MWC regional representative for South Asia, one way I intersect with the work of MCC is to serve on the selection committee for applicants to the YAMEN and IVEP young adult service programs, with YAMEN facilitating South-South service exchange and with IVEP sending young adults from the Global South for a service year in the United States.

Have you witnessed tensions in how MCC and MWC relate to one another? Thankfully, few tensions have arisen between MCC and MWC over the years in South Asia. I have often traveled to visit churches with MCC India leaders, to help foster strong relationships between MCC and the Anabaptist churches in India—I see that as part of my work as an MWC regional representative. MWC and MCC have different ways of working, but we are one in many ways. We need to work together.

MCC India recently indigenized its leadership, with Indian citizens as program representatives. That represents a new way of working with Anabaptist churches in India. I look forward to working with the MCC India representatives in visiting Anabaptist churches in the country to strengthen MCC's relationships with those churches. If anyone has concerns, let's sit and talk and clarify anything that is unclear.

ff MWC and MCC have different ways of working, but we are one in many ways. We need to work together.”



Pravasini Dehuri received a female goat in 2020 through an MCC-supported-project carried out by the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India with the Brethren in Christ church in India. The mother goat is shown here with her three children. This project was implemented in four village-dwelling communities in Thakurmunda block, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha state. (MCC photo/Mukul Harishchandra)

In recent years, MWC's Global Church Sharing Fund has started supporting humanitarian assistance requests from member churches. You previously chaired the MWC deacons commission. What is the GCSF's role in nurturing the witness of the global Anabaptist church? The GCSF's mandate was initially to equip the church to meet the needs of the people in the pews initially. It has now expanded to support outreach beyond the church—not only through evangelism but also through humanitarian initiatives. The GCSF can support the construction or repair of church buildings, leadership training and curriculum development, as well as humanitarian outreach.

How does the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI) relate to both MCC and MWC? MCSFI was established by Anabaptist churches in India in the mid-1960s with support from MCC and from other Anabaptist mission agencies. The vision for MCSFI was to encourage connections and collaboration among India's Anabaptist churches and to serve as a body that could encourage and accompany these churches in humanitarian and development work. Through MCSFI, MCC has both supported relief, development and peace projects and has organized training workshops for churches on project management. In recent years, MCSFI has lost its approval under India's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to receive grants from organizations outside India. Some Anabaptist churches in India have also lost their FCRA approvals. Navigating FCRA realities has required creativity on the part of MCC and MWC in connecting to Anabaptist churches in India.

How is the church witnessing to God's love in present-day India? What are the opportunities and challenges? The reality is that there is persecution—this persecution has increased over the past ten to 15 years. With heightened restrictions on the church's outreach in India (with persecution more acute in some states than in others), how does the church continue to spread God's love? Mass evangelism cannot continue as before. The need for well-trained pastors and leaders who know how to navigate these realities is acute, pastors who can relate with non-Christians respectfully. Our message is that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life—we need pastors who can communicate this message in an appropriate way within the Indian context.

These years of greater restrictions on the church's witness have led to greater unity among churches, with more collaboration on practical projects. Even among Anabaptist churches in India we see more readiness for collaboration, including in learning together what it means to be a peace church. As Christians, we are a small part of India's population (around 3%). That said, given India's large population, in terms of sheer numbers the church in India is still large. We can make a positive impact in this country. MCC has an important role to play in accompanying Anabaptist churches as they discern how to reach out beyond themselves in ministries of relief, development and peace.

Cynthia Peacock is MWC regional representative for South Asia.

“As Christians, we are a small part of India's population (around 3%). That said, given India's large population, in terms of sheer numbers, the church in India is large. We can make a positive impact in this country.”

MCC and European Mennonites: a history of collaboration and fellowship

The connection between MCC and European Mennonites has been strong for over a century—from MCC’s founding in 1920 to distribute food relief in war-torn southern Russia (now Ukraine) in response to the call of Mennonites facing famine to the distribution today of comforters, hygiene kits and schoolbags in Ukraine. In the 1920s in what is now Ukraine, MCC worked with Mennonite communities to distribute food assistance, an enormous effort that involved operating more than 140 soup kitchens and distributing other relief goods. This initial relief response was quickly followed by development work to promote long-term stability and independence from outside help. This was a vision that was ahead of its time!

The 1930s brought more unrest in Europe. The civil war in Spain led to streams of refugees into France. MCC responded by joining French Mennonites to build homes for children to give them a safe environment. Already during the Second World War, MCC prepared for large-scale relief in the countries that had suffered so much damage from the fighting, bombing and occupation. In 1944, MCC set up a center in London to prepare for this enormous effort. After the war’s end in Europe, the MCC European headquarters moved to Amsterdam in the Netherlands and then to Basel, Switzerland.

Many older people in France, the Netherlands and Germany remember fondly the young Mennonite men who served in a Europe devastated by war as an alternative to military conscription through MCC’s Pax program, rebuilding houses and building new homes for refugees. These European Mennonites also fondly remember the warmth of comforters shipped and distributed by MCC. MCC carried out these relief efforts with Mennonite churches in Germany, the Netherlands, France and Switzerland, churches whose countries had been on different sides of the war.

After the war, MCC also facilitated the migration of thousands of Mennonite refugees from Eastern Europe to Canada and to countries in Latin America, such as Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. A major humanitarian initiative, this refugee resettlement was also marked by the ambiguities of working with Mennonites who had become entangled in numerous complex ways with National Socialism before and during the war.

The post-war period also witnessed the emergence of “trainee” programs—the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) and Intermenno. Numerous European young people worked for a year in the United States and Canada through IVEP, while young adults from Canada and the U.S. volunteered in Europe through Intermenno. For most of these young adults, the experience of international Anabaptist community and intercultural exchange was life changing. Over the decades, it became harder to find participants for the Intermenno project, resulting in its termination in 2011. Increased globalization with more possibilities to travel and the rise of the Internet likely contributed to young people becoming less interested in this exchange.

 **The connection between MCC and European Mennonites has been strong for over a century—from MCC’s founding in 1920 to distribute food relief in war-torn southern Russia (now Ukraine) in response to the call of Mennonites facing famine to the distribution today of comforters, hygiene kits and schoolbags in Ukraine.”**

Between 1969 and 1979, MCC did not have representation in Europe. During the 1980s, many thousands of German-Russian Mennonites got the chance to travel to the west. German and Dutch Mennonites mobilized to welcome them, with MCC supporting this work. Then, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, war broke out in the Balkans. In response to the humanitarian crises accompanying the breakup of Yugoslavia, MCC and Swiss Mennonites began distributing hygiene kits to refugees in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. MCC then expanded this work with European Mennonite relief organizations to distribute canned meat and to promote peace and reconciliation efforts. In more recent years, MCC and European Mennonites have collaborated to distribute comforters and hygiene and relief kits to displaced people in Ukraine, Syria and Lebanon.

Together with MWC, MCC set up the YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) project. This project gives young Anabaptist adults from outside the U.S. and Canada the chance to serve for a year with local MCC partner organizations in different parts of the world (with a focus on the Global South). YAMEN represents an important avenue for young adults to broaden their horizons and to grow spiritually through engagement with other cultures and churches. Many European young adults have been part of the program since its inception. However, now the participation of youth from Western Europe is less than it used to be. The changing role of the church in society, secularization and culture change are all possible causes for this decrease in the participation by European youth in YAMEN (even as participation in YAMEN continues to grow on the part of churches in the Global South).

From the 1960s onward, Western Europe became increasingly wealthy. This development meant that Mennonites in these areas were less the subject of relief aid and became more partners of MCC in relief projects, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. European Mennonite churches started projects for making comforters as well as hygiene and school kits, with churches filling shipping containers with these supplies to be shipped by MCC for distribution among displaced people in Syria and Lebanon.

For many years, MCC had representatives based in Strasbourg, France—today, MCC’s area directors for Europe and the Middle East, based in Jordan, carry the relationship with European Mennonite churches. These MCC staff organize yearly meetings with representatives of the European Mennonite peace organizations. This annual round table is very important for fostering mutual understanding and relationships between MCC and European Mennonites. Studying together and listening to one another’s experiences results in mutual learning and inspiration. Personal relationships make contact between the meetings easier. These meetings are a concrete way that MCC supports European Mennonite peace work.

After the invasion by the Russian military of Ukraine in February 2022, MCC and Mennonite churches in Western Europe sent comforters to Ukraine to support Ukrainian Mennonite churches as they supported internally displaced Ukrainians and people who remained in villages under attack. The relief outreach of the small Anabaptist churches in Ukraine to their internally displaced fellow citizens has been impressive. As happened in 1920, MCC once again supports partners carrying out relief and peace work in this suffering region of Europe.

“From the 1960s onward, Western Europe became more and increasingly wealthy. This development meant that the Mennonites in these areas were less the subject of relief aid and became more partners of MCC in relief projects, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.”

The joint meeting of the European Mennonite Relief Organization (EMRO) regularly gathers with MCC leaders to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding between MCC and European Mennonite agencies. This was especially important when MCC decided to close its office in Western Europe at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. European Mennonite conferences were deeply disappointed that they were not consulted in this decision. They were very happy with MCC's representatives to Western Europe and were convinced that it would have been possible to find a solution for the financial problem. Through conversation between EMRO and MCC, it was possible to talk about this painful decision and to come to understand different points of view.

Over the course of more than one hundred years, European Mennonite churches have become partners to MCC, including through cooperation in projects in Europe and through financial support of MCC's global work. The bond between the European Anabaptist churches and MCC has grown very strong, creating a global effort for relief and peace work from an Anabaptist perspective.

Henk Stenvers is president of Mennonite World Conference. The former secretary of MWC's deacons commission, Stenvers lives in Naarden, the Netherlands.

MCC, MWC and the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso

During the long drought in the 1970s in the Sahel countries of Africa, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Burkina Faso (FEME), through the Burkina Faso Project Office (which later became the Office for the Development of Evangelical Churches, or ODE), invited Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. MCC arrived in Upper Volta in 1975 as a humanitarian organization, working under the umbrella of ODE.

MCC workers who arrived in Burkina noted that there was a physical need (famine, lack of water) but also a spiritual need (a country little reached by the Gospel of Jesus Christ). MCC issued a report and launched a call to the Mennonite missionary agencies of the United States and Canada. Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) answered this cry by sending the first Anabaptist missionaries to Upper Volta in 1978. MCC was thus the precursor to the birth of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Burkina Faso (EEM BF).

Birth of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso: Two years after the arrival of the first Mennonite missionaries, the EEM BF was born in 1980 with the first baptism. In 1984, the church became an associate member of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and participated in its first General Assembly in France. Since then, at each General Assembly of the MWC, the EEM BF has participated. Members of the EEM BF have taken on responsibilities in different MWC commissions. Through MWC, the EEM BF has become aware of its duty of accountability to the body of Christ at not only the national but also the international level. Through participation in MWC, the EEM BF has acquired skills to better serve the Lord.

 **MCC's service programs have helped develop the vision of several young people for ministry within the Mennonite church in Burkina Faso."**

YAMEN participant Deepshikha Murmu, left, participates as member of the choir from Belleville Mennonite Church in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso in November 2024. (MCC photo/Rick Cober Bauman)



Development of Anabaptist/Mennonite values: In walking alongside MCC, the ministry of the EEM BF has grown. In 1998, MCC sent an EEM BF member to Switzerland for a three-week training in conflict transformation. Upon his return, this person worked at the grassroots level for peace in families within the EEM BF, but also among non-Christian families. In 2002, the MCC also initiated training for several church and civil society leaders in Burkina Faso in the field of peacebuilding. MCC sent six EEM BF leaders to Ghana for training on transformation and peacebuilding at West Africa Peacebuilding Network (WANEP). Today, several churches in Burkina Faso have a ministry of peace and believe in the peaceful way as a constructive approach in times of crisis. From 2000 to 2006, a leader of the EEM BF worked in a regional peacebuilding program in West Africa and Chad. In 2004, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Burkina Faso asked a member of the EEM BF, in view of our values for peace, to represent it within the Commission for the Monitoring of National Reconciliation. Today, in partnership with MCC Burkina Faso, we have a program of sowing peace in the hearts of young children in Orodara. This program operates within schools (including public, private and even Qur'anic schools), teaching young girls and boys from 11 to 25 years old to cultivate values of peace. Through this program, the church has opportunities for exchange and relationship building across various parts of the society. EEM BF is recognized in Burkina Faso as a church that advocates the values of peace and is called upon in situations of mediation and reconciliation.

“Today, in partnership with MCC Burkina Faso, we have a program of sowing peace in the hearts of young children in Orodara.”

Exchange programs: We are grateful to God for the establishment of MCC exchange programs. Eight young people from the EEM BF have taken part in MCC's IVEP and YAMEN exchange programs. The church has also welcomed young people to service in Burkina Faso through MCC's SALT program. These programs have helped develop the vision of several young people for ministry in EEM BF. The alumni of these MCC service programs are all involved in ministries within the EEM BF. These programs have been a school for the service of God. We also have received good feed-

back regarding the young people who came from the U.S. and Canada to Burkina Faso through SALT.

Building the Kingdom of God together: MCC and MWC have also contributed to the holistic development of EEM BF. The Bible school in Orodara and the local church of Colma in Bobo-Dioulasso have benefited from MWC's Global Church Sharing Fund, a fund supported by MCC. Today the Bible school has trained dozens of pastors who are active in God's ministry in Burkina Faso. We were also able to send one of these trainees as a missionary to Mali among the Jalon people.

General Impact: We can say that thanks to the relationships of EEM BF with MCC and MWC, the EEM BF is well known worldwide. Thanks to these two organizations, we participate in the global life of the great Anabaptist family. Although we are a small community, we are honored and welcomed in the same way as the large Anabaptist communities. This communion comforts and stimulates us to serve the Lord more. MCC and MWC have contributed to the development of the ministry of EEM BF in Burkina Faso and beyond.

Conclusion: Through MCC and MWC, we have learned how relationships with others are conducted with justice, equity and mutual acceptance and carried out in loving service of God. We can affirm that in the EEM BF's collaboration with MWC and MCC, this word of Scripture becomes concrete: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, KJV).

Siaka Traoré is Mennonite World Conference's regional representative for Central West Africa. He lives in Orodara, Burkina Faso.

MCC, MWC and Anabaptist churches collaborating in mission in the Andean region of South America

In the Andean region of South America, composed of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, there are more than 12 Anabaptist conferences or church organizations, of which six are members of Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has an office in Colombia from which it provides ongoing support for initiatives in Colombia and Ecuador.

Anabaptist churches in the Andean Region have holistic mission perspectives, sharing the gospel through preaching, worship, social service, development, education and at times health care outreach. MCC came to the region in the mid-1970s and joined in this holistic vision of mission, supporting and facilitating relief, development and peacebuilding ministries. MCC's work in the Andean region began in 1975, with MCC eventually establishing an office in Bogotá in 2002. For its part, MWC has been present through the membership of two national church conferences in Peru, one in Ecuador and three in Colombia. Since 2015, MWC's representative for the Andean region has also maintained contact with Anabaptist conferences that are not yet members of MWC's global Anabaptist fellowship.

 **Although we are a small community, we are honored and welcomed in the same way as the large Anabaptist communities. This communion comforts and stimulates us to serve the Lord more."**

This holistic mission perspective of Anabaptist churches in the Andean region has facilitated relationships among national church conferences and with MCC and MWC. The following are some examples:

- To respond to the evident need for economic development, the Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Church in Colombia joined forces, with the support of MCC, to create the Colombian Mennonite Foundation for Development, Mencoledes.
- In an effort to provide churches with knowledge, skills and tools to respond to the trauma generated by the violence of the armed conflict, the three Anabaptist denominations in Colombia (MB, MC and BIC) joined together to create the Church Coordination for Psychosocial Action, CEAS.
- In response to the violence and forced recruitment by the Colombian army and non-state armed groups, Anabaptist churches in Colombia with support from MCC developed programs, information and materials on nonviolent conflict transformation, conscientious objection, peacebuilding and care for displaced populations and migrants.
- The Quito Mennonite Church, the Colombian Mennonite Church, MCC, Mennonite Mission Network and the Central Plains Conference of Mennonite Church USA have coordinated efforts to respond to refugees arriving in Ecuador.

These initiatives have all arisen within the Anabaptist churches in the region, with MCC and MWC then providing support in various ways. MCC has also initiated conversations well-received within Anabaptist churches in the region about safeguarding children and other vulnerable people from sexual exploitation and abuse.

MCC and MWC have accompanied and encouraged inter-conference gatherings of churches in the Andean region. In the past, this also included united worship services in Bogotá. MCC holds annual meetings of staff from the projects it supports, thus bringing churches together to discuss shared issues in their ministries. MCC also has a unique program to support initiatives of local churches, linking MCC with the mission activities of local congregations and facilitating exchanges and fellowship between people from these congregations.

MWC has joined in the mission of the Anabaptist churches in the Andes in various ways. Members of the churches have participated in MWC's global assemblies, contributing their experiences and knowledge and taking home inspiration and new relationships. Members of the Colombian churches have been part of MWC's general council, its executive committee and its different commissions, while the current MWC general secretary is from Colombia. Pastors and congregational leaders receive publications and invitations to participate in regular activities such as MWC's online prayer hour. MWC has appointed me as a representative to visit and maintain ongoing contact with the churches of the Andean region, be they members or not. The MWC president and secretary general, meanwhile, have visited personally, bringing messages of encouragement and support, while also receiving inspiration from the churches they visit.

 **MCC and MWC have accompanied and encouraged inter-conference gatherings of churches in the Andean region. MCC holds annual meetings of staff from the projects it supports, thus bringing churches together to discuss shared issues in their ministries.”**


MWC and MCC have joined efforts to support disaster recovery efforts with finances and personnel, such as after the flooding in Piura, Peru, and the earthquake in eastern Ecuador. They have contributed resources to support local conference responses to the ravages of the COVID pandemic. Through its Global Church Sharing Fund, MWC provides resources to support churches in responding to specific needs identified by churches in carrying out their mission.

Given this history of collaboration, what are some of the challenges and lessons learned? The relationship between the churches and MWC is established through mutual written and voluntary agreements that include commitments on both sides. The presence of MCC in Colombia and Ecuador is at the invitation of the churches and is established by agreement between the three Colombian denominations and MCC, which stipulates, among other things, that MCC will develop its work primarily with the churches and that the churches, for their part, will provide MCC legal representation before the Colombia state, serve as consultants to MCC and participate jointly in the development of agreed-upon relief, development and peacebuilding activities. These formal agreements as well as mutual interest in the church's mission initiatives have served as a glue and incentive to cultivate relationships and develop procedures that facilitate and promote joint work.

By contrast, the conferences do not have such agreements with each other, perhaps contributing to a felt lesser need and incentive for closer relations and collaboration among them. It is not unusual for differences among the church conferences to arise, including about perceived doctrinal differences. There has also been a decrease in the churches' interest in their youth participating in the exchange programs offered by MCC and MWC, perhaps because of other options or because of differences around program emphases. Occasionally, negative experiences in one of those programs have frayed the trust between the churches, MWC and MCC, which takes time to rebuild. But just as there are challenges, there is evidence of increased capacity in the churches and organizations, as well as in MCC and MWC, because of their common collaboration.

Greater contact and communication foster increased understanding and collaboration. Joint activities have promoted contact and communication, strengthening relationships. In turn, the strengthened relationships between MCC, MWC and the churches have been fundamental in binding them together to jointly carry out the mission to which they have been called in following Jesus Christ.

Paul Stucky is MWC regional representative for the Andean region. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia.

 **Greater contact and communication foster increased understanding and collaboration.”**



Bacao is a sweet fruit similar to cacao and grows locally in Chocó Department, Colombia. MCC partner FAGROTES (Fundación Agropecuaria Tejiendo Esperanza/Weaving Hope Agricultural Foundation), studies varieties of cacao plants at their tree nursery where they also grow bacao trees. Founded by the Mennonite Brethren church in Colombia in Istmina, Chocó Department. FAGROTES promotes sustainable socioeconomic development through training and citizen participation in innovative processes of agricultural production. FAGROTES focuses on protecting the environment and reducing poverty to improve the well-being of the Black, Indigenous and Mestizo people groups of Colombia and on peacebuilding strategies. September 2022. (MCC photo/ Johan Daza Sigler)

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Editor: Alain Epp Weaver. Opinions expressed in this newsletter reflect those of the authors and not necessarily those of Mennonite Central Committee

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