In the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus says that when we work together and act as one, we are a sign of God sending Jesus into the world and a sign that God loves the world. From the first impulse one hundred years ago by churches in the United States and Canada to help people in desperate need in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) to MCC's ministries today in over 50 countries around the world, including Canada and the U.S., MCC has brought Anabaptist churches together to be a part of God’s mission in the world.

“In the name of Christ,” one MCC worker told a group recently, is more than a slogan—it is why we do what we do. We could not agree more. While MCC works to assist all people in need around the world, regardless of faith tradition, our work in relief, development and peace proclaims our gratitude for our Savior. Jesus has shared the fullness of life with us and we want to share it with others.

As Beachy Amish, Brethren in Christ, Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, Conservative Mennonites, Old Order Amish and Mennonites and more, when we work together through MCC to share a cup of water with our neighbors at home and throughout the world, we signal to these communities that God loves them. “In the Name of Christ” names what is foundational to MCC service: the why of MCC service is integral to and inseparable from the what of relief, development and peace.
This issue of *Intersections* focuses on our work “In the Name of Christ,” and completes the four centennial issues that have examined MCC’s century of working at relief, development and peace in Christ’s name. César García, president of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), reflects on the past, present and future of the partnership between MWC and MCC. Church leaders from the United States, Canada and churches around the world reflect on what service in the name of Christ looks like in their contexts and on their hopes for MCC’s partnership with the church as MCC enters its second century.

May God continue to use this ministry of the churches we call MCC in its next one hundred years as a testimony to God sending Jesus into the world and a sign of God’s love for all.

*Ron Byler and Ann Graber Hersberger are MCC U.S. executive director and associate executive director, respectively.*

### Defining identities: MCC and Mennonite World Conference

“The church will slow down the work of Mennonite Central Committee,” a person at the 2008 MCC New Wine, New Wineskins consultative process meeting in Winnipeg told me. “If we want to be a more effective NGO, we need to act independently from the church,” he continued. I remember that consultation as an opportunity for me to reaffirm my Anabaptist convictions about the church. Yes, the church may not be very effective in fulfilling NGO standards of professional management and administrative structure, but it nevertheless embodies God’s method of real and long-lasting social transformation.

Social transformation is a goal shared by MCC and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). But what roles do MWC and MCC play in pursuing this goal? Surveying the past decades, we see that MCC’s and MWC’s histories have been intertwined, with the two bodies shaping each other and shaping broader understandings of Anabaptist identity. In the words of former MCC executive director Ron Mathies, “the two organizations are made of the same cloth—the fabric of Anabaptist peoplehood—and have had an increasing impact on each other and the mission of the church over the past decades” (Mathies, 85).

The MWC-MCC relationship throughout the decades has been marked by counsel and cooperation. Both MCC and MWC started in response to the context of violence and persecution that Mennonites were facing in Europe and Russia in the second decade of the last century. MCC began in 1920 as a service arm of churches in the United States and Canada to support Mennonite refugees and families affected by war and famine in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine), with this relief ministry joined from MCC’s inception by development and peace work. In 1925, MWC emerged as a way of bringing Mennonites together, affirming the cross-cultural faith in Jesus as understood in the Anabaptist tradition, a faith that is capable of overcoming nationalisms and racism.

As Mathies explains, over the course of their histories both MCC and MWC have placed a strong emphasis on inter-Mennonite solidarity, have shared
leaders (including presidents, executive secretaries and senior staff), supported
each other (e.g., planning the logistics of MWC global assemblies and global
consultations) and connected churches around common goals (such as through
the YAMEN program). These converging purposes and leadership exchanges
are understandable due to the ecclesiological understanding that Anabaptists
have about mission. Mission, from the Anabaptist point of view, is something
done by the church in the world as a witness to Christ. It cannot be completely
delegated to specialists or independent institutions. Moreover, the church per
se is mission, which makes it difficult to separate or compartmentalize mission
and church.

Catholic theologian Gerhard Lohfink has rightly insisted that “the real being of
Christ can be bright only if the church makes visible the messianic alternative
and the new eschatological creation that happens from Christ” (191-192). This
new eschatological creation is global and multicultural in scope. It overcomes
nationalisms and other boundaries, facilitating interdependence, care and love
for one other. Our world desperately needs to see this eschatological reality
manifested today. That is a call to which MWC responds by becoming a global
communion.

MWC has understood itself as part of God’s activity of bringing together
diverse social fragments—as parts of the same body—to make God’s new
creation visible. As a global church in the Anabaptist tradition, MWC is a place
where all member churches sit together with the same level of mutual authority
regardless of their ethnicity, financial capacity and Anabaptist distinctives. It is a
place where theology, service, education, peacemaking, church planting, health
care, pastoral care, worship, ministries of women and youth and other ecclesial
activities happen globally and cross-culturally. In this manner, MWC serves as a
global alternative community to the states of this world.

MCC is a global organization that strives to share God’s love and compassion
in the name of Christ through relief, development and peacebuilding. In these
three specific areas, MCC serves as an arm of the church. Its identity is deeply
ecclesiological, an essential part of the mission of the church in the world.

Mary Martin, sewing and textile
coordinator at the MCC East Coast
Material Resources Center (MRC)
in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, holds
one of the 10,000 bags that MRC
volunteers produced as handouts
for the 2015 Mennonite World
Conference (MWC) Assembly
Gathering in July. The bags were
made from donated fabric using
the same pattern as the MCC
kits bags. Instead of putting draw
strings in them, donated neckties
were sewn on the bags like a
shoulder strap. (MCC photo/
Brenda Burkholder)
One of the essential questions of MCC’s New Wine, New Wineskins revisioning and restructuring process was, “To whom is MCC accountable (who is the ‘keeper of the MCC soul’)?” From the MWC perspective, it was clear that, even though MCC has multicultural staff and volunteers all over the world, it is accountable to Anabaptist churches in Canada and the United States, who are the owners of MCC. In a similar way, churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America have developed their own service structures as they have matured and developed. However, none of their agencies have the experience, capacity and global reach that MCC has. Therefore, in practice, MCC has been called to provide a leadership role within the network of Anabaptist agencies in MWC.

Through MCC’s active participation in MWC’s Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN), new possibilities of global, inter-Anabaptist collaboration have emerged over the past decade: coordinating multiagency responses to natural disasters or other crises, joint planning of cross-cultural ministries of service with other Anabaptist agencies, supporting national churches in creating their own service structures and helping Anabaptist service agencies around the globe build their own capacity.

With MCC’s active role in the GASN, which itself is part of MWC’s Mission Commission, there are endless possibilities of coordinated planning and interdependent work among agencies from different cultures and with different ministries such as church planting, peacemaking, healthcare and education. As we look to MCC’s second century—and soon MWC’s second century—can we dream together about multicultural Anabaptist teams serving together in the same geographical area providing relief, education, health, peacemaking, church planting and social development? I think so. I think that is God’s call for our church and mission.

César García is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

In the name of Christ: keywords and excerpts from MCC’s missiology across the decades

Given that MCC is a one-hundred-year-old organization representing a wide range of Anabaptist churches in Canada and the United States, churches with diverse theologies and practices, it should come as no surprise that MCC’s missiology has changed and developed over time, even as lines of continuity can be charted. This article does not offer a missiological history of MCC, but instead highlights keywords which future historians of MCC’s missiology would do well to examine, alongside representative excerpts from diverse documents that offer windows into MCC’s evolving missiology over the decades.

A key phrase in MCC’s missiology over time has been “In the Name of Christ.” First proposed in 1941 by John and Eileen Coffman, MCC workers in war-torn England, as a “little slogan” that could be attached to “the clothing that is made and donated by our people,” the phrase “In the Name of Christ” quickly became a widely-used shorthand for naming the motivation undergirding all of MCC’s work. The phrase continues to be used extensively within MCC’s public and internal communication, an ongoing reminder that MCC’s relief, development and peace efforts are a form of Christian witness.


While “In the Name of Christ” would arguably stand out as the most significant keyword or phrase in a history of MCC’s missiology, other keywords would also receive sustained attention. The quartet of *relief, service, peace* and *sharing* would all figure prominently in an account of MCC’s first decades, with service through relief efforts understood as a proactive witness for peace (and as an alternative to war) and as a form of sharing within the global church (*mutual aid*) and beyond. Public and internal documents across MCC’s century also highlight MCC’s identity as an inter-Mennonite or inter-Anabaptist agency, a church-based organization representing diverse Anabaptist churches.

In the second half of MCC’s century, new keywords gained prominence in MCC discourse. From the 1970s into the 1990s, words like *partnership, simple living* (alongside *more-with-less*), *presence, justice, peacemaking, mutual transformation* and *connecting people* began appearing with increasing frequency within MCC publications and internal communication. These new keywords did not replace earlier keywords like *relief* and *In the Name of Christ*, but rather modulated how they were understood.

The excerpts below from a wide variety of documents—from official board statements to internal working papers to news releases to cookbook forewords and more—offer some representative (but by no means exhaustive) examples of how these keywords and phrases have operated within MCC. Future historians of MCC’s understanding of its work and mission will do well to pay attention to the function and development of these keywords within MCC over the decades.

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“North American agencies used to go around running their own programs, using their own personnel and doing pretty well as they pleased. Eventually the error of that approach became obvious and we began to have a great deal of respect for the indigenous process. Now we much prefer to identify an existing agency with which we feel compatible and support it with personnel or money, permitting it to enlarge its effort.”—Edgar Stoesz, “An Improvement, Yet a Dilemma,” *Intercom* (July 1976).

In 1976, the MCC board approved these organizational objectives:

1. To share resources in the name of Christ and proclaim Jesus as Lord.
2. To establish and preserve an identity as free as possible from those nationalistic, cultural and ideological interests which are contrary to our understanding of faithfulness to Christ and to seek to meet human need in any nation regardless of political identity or affiliation.
3. To participate in a development process based on local capacity and self-reliance by which persons and societies come to realize the full potential of their human, natural and spiritual resources.
4. To follow the example of Christ, in striving for justice in identifying with the weak and oppressed and in reconciling the oppressor and oppressed.
5. To provide relief for victims of disasters in ways which encourage their maximum initiative, dignity and participation.
6. To sensitize our constituency to the injustices and human suffering which exist at home and abroad, so that the church can participate in MCC ministries with a greater understanding and follow a life style commitment consistent with Biblical and Anabaptist principles.
7. To attempt to influence, out of our experience, public policy decisions which affect victims of war, hunger and injustice with sensitivity to and in consultation with national churches and groups to which we relate.
8. To support and cooperate with national churches and mission boards, especially in places where Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission and churches are present. Where no Christian groups are present, MCCers should see themselves as a nucleus for a Christian fellowship.


“Mennonites—a people who care about the hungry—are on a search. We are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of our tradition, but take their shape from living faith and the demands of our hungry world.”—Doris Janzen Longacre, “Foreword,” *More-with-Less Cookbook* (1976).

“Although the fact is not widely known, the Mennonite Central Committee has preceded Mennonite mission work in some 20 countries. . . . Wherever MCC has initiated, it has strongly encouraged missions to follow. This pattern is central to MCC’s understanding of word and deed. . . . MCC’s work does not always have to lead to missions. But church planting has often followed, and when it does, MCC looks on it with great joy.”—Marion Keeney Preheim, “MCC: Forerunner in Mission,” MCC Information Services (December 6, 1979).

“A ministry of presence suggests that need is best defined from the stance of being present rather than by strategies inspired by well-developed ideology, media headlines or grandiose projects.”—John A. Lapp, “Report of the Executive Secretary,” 1987.
In 1989, Robert Kreider worked with Reg Toews to list a set of “Unwritten Tenets of MCC Operations.” These included:

- #3: Committed to programs which are personnel intensive.
- #4: Inter-Mennonite in control, staffing and image.
- #14: Growing interest in and commitment to reciprocity, exchange and partnership—seeking the grace of being able to receive gifts as well as give gifts.
- #15: Preference for the small scale. If you make mistakes, let them be little mistakes.
- #21: Committed to the integration of word and deed.

“MCC serves as a channel of interchange by building relationships that are mutually transformative. . . . MCC facilitates interchange and mutual learning between its supporting constituency and those with whom we work around the world, so that all may give and receive.”—Principles that Guide Our Mission (1991).

“We will contribute to the relief of human need and suffering by giving ourselves and our resources. The needs of our world and the cries of people in many places for justice call us to respond as Jesus did, with compassion. At the same time, we recognize our own spiritual and moral poverty and seek to receive the gifts that others, some of whom may be materially poorer than we are, have to share with us.

We will live in relationships of love and mutual respect. We seek to model such relationships in our homes, churches and work places, and to refrain from...
behavior which violates and abuses others physically or emotionally. In the spirit or Christ, we will oppose and seek to correct abusive relationships within our church family.”—From A Commitment to Christ’s Way of Peace (1994).

“Connecting Peoples is rooted in our understanding of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, coming to live among us in order to break down barriers and walls: ‘For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.’ (Ephesians 2:14) MCC seeks to promote Christian unity by supporting constituents and partners who are interested in direct relationships with each other. Such a goal assumes a deep confidence that building relationships—proper relationships based on generosity and accountability—transforms us even as it assaults cultural assumptions.”—Mennonite Central Committee Connecting Peoples Manual, ed. Robert Eugene Brenneman (Akron, PA: MCC, 2003).

“The implications of receiving from God in order to give to others are profound because receiving from God requires a new way of thinking about myself in relation to God and others. Instead of perceiving myself as one who actively initiates a response to the needs around me, I begin to recognize that my concerns for justice and peace are planted in me by God. God is the Source of my desire to serve and I am the recipient of God’s concerns, dreams, and activity in the world.”—Susan Classen, A Spirituality of Service: Freely Give, Freely Receive, MCC Occasional Paper No. 29 (January 2003).


In this 1969 photo, MCC agriculturalist Ervin Koblentz and an Algerian farmer discuss techniques of dry-land farming—cultivating crops in arid conditions. MCC agriculturalists worked with farmers to increase herd strength and general farm productivity. (MCC photo)
Serving in the name of Christ today: challenges and opportunities facing the church

From its inception, MCC has partnered with diverse Anabaptist churches in serving in the name of Christ. For this issue of Intersections in MCC’s centennial year, we asked church leaders from India, Canada, Switzerland, Zimbabwe and Syria about what serving in the name of Christ looks like in their contexts today. As it enters its second century, MCC continues to accompany churches around the globe as they discern how they can faithfully participate in God’s reconciling mission.—The editors.

India

The church in India has long been a subject matter of great curiosity and intrigue, not just from a Christian perspective, but also in the general manner that India and its many religions coexist. India is a predominantly Hindu nation. India’s culture is overwhelmingly rooted in Hinduism. Therefore, the line between religion and culture is often blurred.

How does the body of Christ function in a complex and ancient cultural, socio-economic and political ecosystem like India? No doubt several challenges confront the church. The impact of politics and government policies on the church in India are greater than ever before. The BJP-led government continues to assert its self-proclaimed Hindutva politics in a democracy where minorities feel the heat of an increasingly intolerant majority. More churches have been vandalized in the past five years than over many previous decades put together. Never before have churches in India faced greater scrutiny than today. Scenes of people being lynched on the streets of India, once unprecedented, are today just another headline. Christian organizations which have contributed to the national interest for years have had their funding cut-off and their activities closely monitored on the pretext of possible acts of polarization or “conversion tactics.” The Indian church today is not free to worship, because its mind and heart are bound in chains of fear and anxiety.
However, politics is not the only challenge the church faces. In fact, the bigger challenge comes from within its own fabric. Broken communities, church politics, faithless ministry and godlessness in Indian churches are more common than one would imagine. Moreover, India is projected to become the youngest country in the world by 2022 with over 60 percent of the population under the age of 35. This widening generation gap brings with it several challenges. Contrasting values and principles collide, causing strain within the community. Churches in India today run the risk of becoming obsolete and irrelevant to the young and restless minds of India’s youth.

But where adversity persists, opportunity abounds. The church must take active measures to connect more with the younger lot. Church leadership and clergy must consciously include young people as a mainstay in decisions and day-to-day activities rather than relegating them to merely a youth section of the church. Furthermore, in a world guided by subjective morality, our churches must stand strong on biblical principles and not be swayed by the lure of a false and ungodly culture the world currently thrives on.

The Mennonite Church today has a divine opportunity to show the world how peace and reconciliation can still be sought and found in a broken world. If ever there was a time for the church to proclaim the need for reconciliation and the means to achieve it through the word of the living God, that time is now! We cannot shy away from persecution. We cannot deny that the hardships we face might get worse. We cannot say that followers of Christ will not undergo pain and suffering from the world, as prophesied in Scripture. Yet it is within such persecution that the church has the greatest opportunity for Christ’s body to bring healing wherever there is ailing.

Amidst the hardships faced by the church in India, MCC India has been a great source of encouragement and financial support to the Indian Mennonite churches through its relief and development programs. MCC supports peacebuilding initiatives carried out by Indian Mennonite churches, organizes peace and conflict mediation seminars in congregations and assists the church in working for the empowerment of women and children. The church in India is strengthened in its faith and witness through MCC’s ministry. We praise God for MCC India and its mission in our country.

As India’s population continues to grow, the church must keep its ears open and eyes closed, pointed upwards in expectant prayer. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must unite and pray for a revival over the land of India. As the world looks at us and waits for a day when India becomes a superpower, let us pray that day will be the day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must unite and pray for a revival over the land of India.”

Premanand Bagh teaches in the Christian Ministry Division at Union Biblical Seminary in Pune, India.

Canada

The tag line for my organization, Multiply, reads, “Together, that the world may know.” Philosophically, “together” connotes ideals that are warmly endorsed by faith communities the world over. It embodies community, dependence, humility and unity. The opposing spirit to “together” represents all that is anathema to the Body of Christ, the Bride: isolation, independence, power and enmity.
I have spent the last two years engaging more intentionally with the Lord’s Prayer as part of my personal spiritual disciplines. I want to align myself with the themes upon which Jesus invited his followers to focus and intercede. It seems that the goal of this prayer template was not so much to create a universally repeated liturgy, but instead to steadily renew the mind and soul of the believer through daily prayer into a longing for and engagement with the themes on the heart of God. “Together” is at the core of this petition. The Lord’s Prayer invites us as a global family to pray to “Our Father,” calling for community and not isolation. “Your kingdom come, your will be done” requires humility and an absence of power. “Give us this day our daily bread” embodies dependence, not independence. And finally, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” calls for unity, not enmity. As Jesus invited his disciples to pray, so we are invited to pray and then live out each value, continually resourced by the Holy Spirit.

Where are we seeing this “together” today? In our global context, Multiply has been resourcing North American churches engaging in partnerships with the global church, not simply with a budget line to fund ministry, but with a lifeline, a human bridge of members coming and going to each other’s contexts to serve, support and mutually resource. An Ontario church travels to Germany to partner with a local congregation so that they can in turn support the start-up efforts of another region’s German/Canadian planting team. A rural Ontario community connects with a Thai network reaching out to rural communities in the country. Together, that the world may know.

A team of young adults from around the globe gather in Central Asia and the Middle East to collaborate with those of other faiths on the themes of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. They run a camp together. The team goes in the love of the Father sharing the values of the Prince of Peace as they live and serve in community. Together, that the world may know.

In the Canadian North, denominations unite together to serve Indigenous communities by collaboratively resourcing workers who have relocated to engage in holistic support and witness. Together, that the world may know.

There are challenges in serving together. The global church has faced cultural distinctions, discriminating biases, theological differences and sometimes long histories of division. In Multiply, we have been reminded of the humbling unifying posture embodied in Jesus’ final prayer for disciples the world over: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22b-24, NIV).

If God’s saving love, expressed through the death and resurrection of Jesus, is for every person, every family and every nation, then we as the church are compelled to pray the Lord’s Prayer together—in community, dependence, humility and unity.”

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Robyn Serez is regional mobilizer for Eastern Canada for Multiply.
Switzerland

Five hundred years ago, Europe was seized by the Reformation. At that time, the church was still a major force within society and could play a decisive role in determining which forms of faith and life were accepted. The Anabaptist movement experienced this reality in Zurich. While initially part of renewal movements within the state church and the broader society, Anabaptists were soon persecuted by church and state as heretics and rebels.

Five hundred years later, the church has long since lost this position of social power. In Switzerland we increasingly live in a post-Christendom society. For the church, this does not only mean a theological loss of relevance. Many people today associate the church’s former moral authority with sexual abuse, violence and outdated beliefs. The diaconal commitment of the churches to service has long been appreciated by society, but this has changed noticeably in recent years. Churches which explicitly justify their social action by appeals to their Christian faith are under the suspicion that they merely want to proselytize other people on this path. Such suspicions were factors in the Swiss government’s decision to cut national funds for our Mennonite youth work. The church is under the general suspicion of wanting to interfere in social life in an invasive way.

The church must regain its credibility in our society. But it cannot do so as it did five hundred years ago. The church must learn to live as a minority in our society. This is a challenge and, above all, an unusual situation for the large national churches. As Mennonites, we think that this is first and foremost an opportunity.

If the church as a whole comes into a minority position, a new coexistence of the different churches is needed. The church cannot serve our society with denominational disputes, but only as a common and reconciled body of Christ. Service to society must therefore not be misused as a means of gaining new members for one’s own denomination. If the church is marginalized in society, it naturally loses its influence, which is based on a position of social power. But this powerlessness is a great opportunity for the witness of our churches. For at the margins of society we first learn to know Christ himself anew. This can happen if we turn to the weak in our society. Not only do we serve them in the name of Jesus, but first and foremost we encounter Jesus himself in them. As a powerless church, we also no longer have any claims to power to defend, as was so often the case in the Christendom. A powerless church is in a good position to build bridges between different social groups.

As a church we therefore want to learn anew to live the reconciliation given in Christ. We practice how to deal constructively with conflicts and thus make a contribution to peace in society. After all, a post-Christendom society also means a pluralistic society. We must therefore learn to participate in a broader conversation about how a flourishing life is possible for all within a pluralistic society.

Finally, when one considers Switzerland within the global context, we recognize that we belong to one of the richest societies in the world. This obliges us to show solidarity with the world’s poorest and to make a substantial contribution to a fairer world. In doing so, we must live with the challenge that there are still very different forms of need in our society.

*Lukas Amstutz is co-president of the Swiss Mennonite Conference and is the programme director of the Theological Seminary Bienenberg.*
Zimbabwe

The apostle Paul proclaimed: “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5, NIV). This proclamation sets the tone for all who seek to work in the name of Christ. The church, however, faces challenges and opportunities wherever it serves. Challenges usually herald abundant opportunities for change. For this reflection, I engaged some Anabaptist church leaders in southern Africa about what they see as the challenges and opportunities faced by the church. I heard three main themes from this feedback, namely, challenges and opportunities related to economics, technology and leadership.

**Economics:** Implementing and operating mission activities with poor human and material resources are immensely challenging. Many churches, including mine, have for many years looked to the mother church in the U.S. and Canada to provide highly trained theologians and to offer resource tools to mobilize evangelism as part of the church’s fulfillment of its mandate. Many rural churches are so poor that only the pastor owns a Bible. Also, sadly, a cancer that has crept into many churches in southern Africa is the onslaught of the exploitative prosperity and healing gospel moguls. In South Africa, one pastor made his naïve congregants eat grass and flowers and drink petrol to be “closer to God.” There was even a pseudo-miracle of claiming to raise a person from the dead in South Africa.

Islam has an upper hand in this region because their missionaries proclaim Islam while simultaneously providing the material assistance people need, such as food, clothes, school fees for children and even housing. Many say that is how Christianity is undermined.

These challenges reflect the dire hunger and thirst for something more fulfilling. They present opportunities for genuine evangelists of integrity to present the pure gospel of Christ.

**Technology:** Access to the internet and social media has many positive results for congregations and congregants. These include easy access to Christian broadcasts, training programmes and Bible studies. On the other hand,

Genuine evangelists of integrity have an opportunity to present the pure gospel of Christ.”

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC/Ethiopian Mennonite Church) had an HIV/AIDS Support Group as part of its AIDS programming in 2006. Some members of the group formed a choir composed entirely of people living with HIV/AIDS. The choir traveled from church to church to share their music and message aiming to reduce stigma and discrimination in the church. On this day in July 2006, the choir performed at an MKC church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

(MCC photo/Sarah Adams)
social media has created havoc, especially with young people. Parents are competing with media of different types as they seek to raise and discipline children. There is general moral decline due to the encroachment of various media content, which may be both foreign and negative to African cultural and Christian norms.

**Leadership:** Many denominational congregations are led by part-time and untrained leaders. Southern Africa is still deeply entrenched in patriarchy and male-domination in ministry work. Denominations such as Methodists, Lutherans and the Church of Christ have many women in leadership roles. Be in Christ and Brethren in Christ churches in North America have ordained women in ministry as they believe both men and women are equally called and empowered to work in missions. In the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia and Zimbabwe, rural areas have a majority of women pastors who serve on a voluntary basis, as they are not trained for the task. Lack of training causes the women-led rural congregations to be marginalized.

The church globally is consumed by materialism and secularism which makes it lukewarm. Yusufu Turaki says that materialism makes Christians lukewarm and indifferent to their faith. There is ample opportunity for the church in the global North to partner with the church in the global South, the former providing needed resources to further the gospel while the latter provides the zeal and passion for the gospel.

*Barbara Nkala is Mennonite World Conference regional representative for Southern Africa.*

**Syria**

Hama is a Syrian city with a great history and a proud multi-cultural heritage in which Muslims, Christians and others have lived together in peace and harmony for centuries. Unfortunately, the war that has been fought inside Syria for almost a decade has wounded this heritage.

Christianity entered Hama in the earliest decades after Jesus’ resurrection. Within the city today there are eight existing churches, the remains of a great cathedral and a monastery. The countryside surrounding Hama is full of towns populated not only by Sunni Muslims, Alawites and Ismailis, but also by Christians, who for centuries have lived in villages like Kefarh, Ayu, Bayh, Tumin, Maharada, Skelebiyya, Baydah and Bayadiyah. Hama and its surroundings have for centuries reflected a multi-cultural Islamic society, a society which accepts others for who they are and in which Christians have led the Christian life according to Jesus and his word. Christians have had friendly relations with their Muslim neighbors, who have respected them as followers of ‘Issa (the Qur’anic name for Jesus), son of Mary.

With the start of violent conflict inside Syria in 2011, Hama’s multi-cultural fabric has been torn. Syrian Christians have now sometimes come to be associated by some Muslims with the West. Amidst these new challenges, the role of the Church grew in extinguishing fires of hostility, declaring: “We are all partners in pain and sorrow, in joy and loss—this is not a religious war! We are brothers and sisters!”

Through the viciousness of war, marked by anxiety, distress, homelessness, hunger, pain and insecurity, breaks through a ray of light: humanitarian assistance. By extending humanitarian assistance, the church proclaims that
“The other is me, I am the other: we do not simply live together, but rather we live and survive together.” Over the course of the violence, our churches have become signs of hope to the people of Hama, offering refuge for all in need. People who came in need to Hama’s churches discovered in these churches the true love that crowns acts of mercy. Amid violent conflict, the church calls out: “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, NRSV). In the face of shelling, missiles and violent incursions, the church in Hama has remained steadfast and faithful to its mission, proclaiming God’s glory through its good works (Matthew 5:16). Meanwhile, the faces of perseverance from the displaced, hungry and suffering people who have come to us from Homs, Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqa, Deir al-Zour, Hasakah and Qamishli give us hope for a better future.

The aid sent by the churches in Canada, the United States and Europe has been a blessing. Support from MCC and Canadian Foodgrains Bank has enabled displaced refugees and host communities to survive and maintain their dignity in a war that not only destroyed buildings and a way of life but also the woven fabric that has held the Syrian way of life together. In faith, like Peter, the church in Hama cast out a net, and thanks to God’s grace and the work of the church around the world, we pulled in a catch of 153 fish, and our net did not break (John 21:11). We are faced with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who works through the loyal, faithful and weak in the East and the West. We can only bow and be thankful.

We believe that the Spirit of God works in us all for good. We also believe that he guided us to our partners like MCC, who have supported us in carrying the message of love and the law of mercy and the light of the Gospel at a time when we struggled to find humanitarian assistance to share this message with our fellow Syrians. Despite the hardships we have faced, we still believe that God will carry out his will.

Boutros Melki is a Syrian Orthodox priest in Hama, Syria.

Serving in the name of Christ in a time of COVID-19

As this issue of Intersections about MCC service in the name of Christ neared completion, the COVID-19 pandemic began expanding in global breadth and depth. This rapidly developing reality led us to invite church leaders from multiple contexts to reflect on what service in the name of Christ looks like amidst a global pandemic.—The editors.

Ethiopia

People have experienced diverse disasters in history. Although the size of these disasters has varied, they have all caused damage. This year, humanity has been threatened by COVID-19. As a church leader, I was confused about how to respond to this virus in our church. As I was seeking God’s guidance, the story of Joseph came to my mind.

In the Bible, there was a man of God who helped the ancient Egyptians navigate through a severe drought and famine (Genesis 41-47). God signaled to the king that a great famine would come upon the country. But no one was available to interpret the message. Joseph, a gifted and experienced interpreter.
of dreams, came from prison and interpreted the king’s dream and analyzed
the situation. Famine in Egypt was uncommon because the Nile River flows
through the country year-round. The disaster was a once-in-a-generation event.

The king was smart. He wanted to assign a capable person to undertake this
life-saving job. He believed Joseph was worthy of this position. Joseph was
appointed the leader of the Disaster Preparedness Agency of the Egyptian
government. His plan was excellent and pleasing to the authorities. The
justifications for Joseph’s appointment were his preparedness plan, that he was
a man of God, that he had a spirit of discernment and that he was wise. From
reading the story of Joseph, I learned five basic principles that have helped me
deal with COVID-19 as a leader in the church.

**First, face the reality.** It is important to anticipate and analyze the impending
danger to prepare well ahead. We need to recognize and accept the realities
on the ground. Rejecting reality is a terrible risk, as it worsens the response
to a disaster. Accepting and telling the truth paves the way for effective
disaster preparedness.

**Second, discern and decide—and be informed by research.** Joseph was a
man of wisdom and was led by the Spirit of God. He wanted to make research-
based decisions, rather than just guessing to save the people from imminent
danger. Joseph surveyed all the resources and conditions in the country
( Gen. 41:46). The nation-wide survey helped to identify the resources, facilities
and challenges in Egypt to deal with the seven-year drought. Leaders informed
by research can prepare well to prevent and/or mitigate disaster.

**Third, set up an effective implementation system.** To manage the disaster,
Joseph developed a centralized system to oversee the implementation of his
plan. Joseph collected 20% of the harvest during the seven years of plenty
and stored them (Gen. 41:34,48-49). He stored up huge quantities of grain
in places accessible to the cities across the country (Gen. 41:48). The logistics
of transporting food items from the center to remote parts of the country can
make it difficult to mount a timely response and adequately address the needs
of the people. An efficient, cost-effective and successful approach is needed to
deal with a disaster.

**Fourth, plan for post-disaster.** Joseph had the end in mind when he developed
the disaster preparedness plan. He planned for post-disaster. When the drought
was gone, he gave seeds to the people so that they could plant and eat. He also
put in place a sustainability strategy for the country (Gen. 47: 23-24). We need
to develop a rehabilitation strategy. We need a plan that helps us to continue
normal life after experiencing a disaster.

**Fifth, have a spirit of gratitude.** Joseph’s strategy saved the lives of many
people (Gen. 47:25). In his discussion with his brothers, Joseph realized that
God used him to save the lives of his family, Egyptians and neighboring nations
(Gen. 42:1-2; 45:5). He was grateful for God’s favor and guidance. For all the
successes, we need to give glory to God.

In Ethiopia, we are not yet through the response cycle to COVID-19. I found
the lessons from Joseph’s experience to be practical and useful, and I pray that
they will be helpful to you as well. God bless you all!

*Desalegn Abebe Ejo is president of the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia.*
In the Gospel of John 20:21 we read, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (NRSV). With these words, Jesus sends his disciples to be agents of love, reconciliation, life and peace in a world in need and in crisis. He sends them to announce and make present the Kingdom of God, sharing God’s justice and peace. Jesus sends them with the good news of our reconciliation back to God and to each other, restoring broken relationships, rebuilding broken lives and working for the well-being of the vulnerable, the impoverished, the afflicted and the needy. This mission given to the disciples by Jesus is still relevant today.

Today we live in a world in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of life. As the disease spreads, it leaves thousands and thousands of people infected, sick, dead, widowed and orphaned. Human suffering is compounded by associated economic and food crises. Many are struck down by fear, anguish, neurosis, uncertainty and loneliness. This unprecedented crisis has become a great challenge for Jesus’ church, its mission and its pastoral action.

As people sent out in the name of Christ, what should we do in the face of this challenge? How should we respond? In times like these, we must continue to be followers of Jesus who show God’s love. We must be communities of care and servant love, committed to individual and community well-being, holistic health, true peace and the promotion of life during crisis and need.

To illustrate what this looks like in practice, I share the testimony of Casa Horeb Mennonite Church in Guatemala City, where I have the privilege of serving on the pastoral team. We are a small community of faith, committed to the gospel of the Kingdom, with a clear commitment to our vocation of love and service. In this time of pandemic, we have had the opportunity to undertake reflections and actions that have led us to reinvent ourselves and find creative ways to show love, engage in spiritual and emotional care, promote holistic and preventative health and make the kingdom of God present in concrete ways, both within our community and beyond. Our activities include:

- Celebrating our meetings and liturgical services online, in a dynamic and creative way. Through these services we affirm people’s faith, life and hope and ensure the inclusion and active participation of all people.
- Being a community of support and accompaniment where we care for and help each other.
- Providing pastoral and psycho-spiritual care, with priority to the elderly, widows, people living on their own, children, young people and people who are sick.
- Sharing encouraging messages with the most vulnerable people and the elderly.
- Energizing and encouraging the practice of prayer through social networks and small online groups.
- Providing training in comprehensive health care and prevention measures to deal with the pandemic, with a strong emphasis on only sharing verified and truthful information.
- Strengthening food security by promoting family gardens, while also cultivating a vegetable garden on the church premises to share the harvest with those living in areas of extreme poverty.
- Opening our church as a refuge for infected people.
- Creating a mercy fund for people without work, who have become unemployed or sick or have lost family members.
- Providing resources for families and children facing grief to strengthen their resiliency.
• Accompanying families in loss and mourning.
• Promoting healthy and peaceful relationships within families in this time of confinement.

In these ways, our small church community seeks to be faithful to God and to its Christian vocation during this time of crisis. Our church community tries to be a sign of faith, life and hope in this hour of uncertainty, fear, suffering and need. Throughout the past months, we have seen how God’s love abounds when we give of what we are and share of what we have, blessing others in Christ’s name.

_Elena Bercián Ramirez is pastor of Anabaptist Community Casa Horeb in Guatemala City, Guatemala._

**DR Congo**

The world is going through a difficult time thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we live and witness in this dangerous time, we must respect barrier measures established by government authorities to prevent and mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, even as we pray for divine intervention. As the Congolese church serves in the name of Christ amidst COVID-19, we remember that nothing is impossible with God and we pray for God’s intervention.

The physical distancing measures necessary to combat COVID-19 bring with them negative realities, such as increased stress, anxiety, bitterness, depression and intra-family conflict. Friends and extended family acutely feel the limitations placed on visits. At the same time, we observe increased levels of social distrust, heightened fear of outsiders, who are suspected of carrying the virus, and stigmatization of people suffering from any disease. People are tempted to turn inward and hesitate to share with one another.

Congolese Christians, as we cry out for divine intervention, are called in this context to be faithful. Essential dimensions of the church’s service in the name of Christ during this pandemic include:

• Responding to the call to sanctification and prayer (1 Peter 1:15-16). Faithful Christians develop lives of devotion, remembering that everything is sanctified by prayer and the word of God (1 Tim. 4:5).
• Listening to Jesus’ insistence to his disciples to be not afraid.
• Respecting public measures instituted to mitigate and prevent transmission of the virus.
• Preaching that highlights God’s sovereignty and fidelity (2 Cor. 1:20, Ps. 105:8; Ps. 119:74), refutes heresies speaking of the imminence of the coming of Christ, (2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9) and emphasizes the fruits of the Holy Spirit that manifest our care for one another.
• Reconstructing and nurturing communion, with an emphasis on accompaniment of and assistance for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Christians called to serve in the name of Christ have Jesus at the center of our faith, community at the center of our lives, protection at the center of our bodies and reconciliation and love at the center of our mission.”

_Antoine Kimbila Musumbungu is the head of the Congolese Mennonite Brethren Church (CEFMC)._
This past April, we heard some happy news here in Saskatoon, Canada: a baby bison was born at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a historic Indigenous site just outside the city. On the surface, this seemed like an ordinary sign of spring. But this birth was profoundly significant: our local newspaper reported that this was the first bison born at Wanuskewin since 1876, when Treaty 6 was signed and local bison became extinct. That means that this baby bison represents several layers of healing: the healing of the land as a local species makes its way back from the brink of extinction; the healing of treaty relationships and reconciliation between settlers like myself and Indigenous peoples as Indigenous heritage is honoured, remembered and restored; and God’s healing as the Divine is present and at work in our context in life-giving ways.

This hopeful event struck me as all the more meaningful as we continue to make our way through this pandemic, when many of us are hungry for good news of hope and healing. Even though Wanuskewin remains closed, it is heartening to know that the baby bison is there—that healing and hopeful things are happening, that reconciliation is moving forward, even now. She is a tangible, living and breathing sign of God moving among us and of the Spirit moving us toward truth and peace and right relationship even amidst all the upheaval.

But the baby bison is also a sign that steps in the right direction are not inevitable. They require sustained effort on the part of many people, as these past months have revealed. As I write this, we are seeing real change in the conversation and policy around racial injustice and equity thanks to Black Lives Matter demonstrations around the world. Closer to where I live, a young northern Saskatchewan man named Tristen Durocher is currently engaged in a ceremonial fast on the grounds of our provincial legislature to protest the rejection of a much-needed suicide prevention bill introduced by the provincial opposition. Calling the action “Walking with Our Angels,” he walked 635 km from Air Ronge to Regina, Saskatchewan, to stay in a teepee surrounded by pictures of young people lost to suicide—a public health crisis which disproportionately affects Indigenous young people in Saskatchewan’s north. As we witness Durocher’s poignant and courageous gestures, I have to wonder: Could it be that the COVID-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink the way our societies have functioned with regard to the status quo of racism and colonialism? Could this major disruption to “business as usual” be the push we needed as societies to take significant and concrete steps toward shalom, toward peace with justice and right relationship among human beings, with God and with all creation? In Virus as a Summons to Faith, released just a few weeks into the pandemic, biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann articulates this same notion: “The good news is that we need not go back to those old ways that are punitive, parsimonious, and predatory. We can embrace a new normal that is God’s gift to us!”

That is certainly the sentiment behind a petition that began to circulate a couple of months ago, entitled, “Canadian Churches for Care and Change in the time of COVID-19” (via change.org). Co-written by Mennonite pastor David Driedger and other faith leaders, the petition calls for a new normal that includes a Jubilee for those most financially vulnerable and special attention to the needs of First Nations communities during this crisis. “COVID-19 has already changed the global landscape. We are asking that we do not return to a system that was increasingly unjust and never sustainable,” they write. “We are willing to seek, work for, and support such changes that can readily be seen as

In February 2020, a young man (name withheld for security reasons) holds items from an MCC relief kit and enjoys the warmth of a blanket handmade by MCC volunteers. He lives in Homs, Syria, with his father, mother and five siblings. They were displaced twice from their home in 2012. The items are part of shipments of MCC humanitarian assistance for internally displaced Syrians through the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC). (Photo courtesy of FMEEC)
Could it be that the COVID-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink the way our societies have functioned with regard to the status quo of racism and colonialism?”

being in the interest of the most vulnerable people and resources in Canada.” I found it deeply encouraging to see the church engaged in this kind of prophetic action in support of healing and hope. This strikes me as precisely where communities of faith are needed during this time of pandemic: we are called to be midwives of life-giving change, pointing to the ways we are interconnected with each other’s well-being, celebrating those moments when shalom is born among us—including the birth of a baby bison on the outskirts of Saskatoon.

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Republic of Korea

Jesus comes proclaiming an upside-down kingdom. The kingdom Jesus announces is not static. This kingdom keeps moving and growing, challenging existing paradigms and stereotypes.

I started my new role with MCC in January 2020, excited to become a part of one hundred years of MCC history. Suddenly, the pandemic began, and now we are headed into the unknown. Indeed, it is a fearful reality. Amidst this fearful uncertainty, can we find God at work? What are we learning from this unexpected pandemic? What does the pandemic reveal? COVID-19 is already laying some truths bare:

- Dis/connections: In living through the pandemic, many of us have realized the depth of our interconnections. At the same time, however, fear from the pandemic is also deepening disconnections from one another and increasing hostility and exclusion.
- The nature of real security: Viruses are more powerful than military might and economic growth. We need more doctors and nurses, not soldiers. Smart public health care systems are matter.
- The myth of developed Western countries: The pandemic has revealed the depth of inequality within many so-called developed countries, with severely disproportionate death rates and health impacts along racial and class lines in nations of the global North.

As the pandemic reveals the deep inequality that scars the world and its nations, MCC is called to live in the light of the kingdom inaugurated by God in Jesus. MCC’s calling of offering relief, development and peace in the name of Christ is a mission grounded in this upside-down kingdom.

The mission of this upside-down kingdom is not the unilateral mission from a supposed world center to its peripheries. MCC in Canada and the U.S. is not the “center” from which relief, development and peace go out. In God’s kingdom, lines between center and periphery and between sender and receiver become blurred. The pandemic reveals to us our global interconnectedness and calls us into a “mission from everywhere to everywhere.”

What can we learn from life amidst a pandemic that will help shape MCC for service in the name of Christ for a second century? Will MCC’s mission become less dependent on fossil fuels? Can MCC become a truly global organization? Within the topsy-turvy COVID-19 realities and in light of the upside-down kingdom Jesus heralds, the time is right to review MCC’s mission and vision with new questions and imagination.

SeongHan Kim is peace educator for MCC Northeast Asia based in Chuncheon, the Republic of Korea.
United States

“The good Samaritan is the story for the time of the pandemic,” a theologian colleague stated on a Zoom panel in late April about how the church is called to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. “It is paradigmatic because the church needs to find ways out of isolation and into service of those most deeply affected by the crisis.” My co-panelist’s reference to Luke 10:25-37 is generally consistent with MCC’s long-standing efforts to give a cup of cold water to those in need (Matthew 10). What he says is true. Yet that was not my answer to the question posed then, and it is not my sole answer now about what Christian service in a time of COVID-19 looks like.

I am writing from Indiana, land of the Potawatomi. I have learned that saying good morning in Potawatami is literally asking, “What is there to bring to light?” That question is, I think, a necessary part of understanding what it means to serve in the name of Christ at this time. We can at least hope that the time of COVID-19 is a time of apocalypse, in the classic sense. Derived from the Greek *apokalypsis*, the word means revelation. The Greek term allows us to ask: what is Christ revealing to us in the context of the pandemic?

If we allow this crisis to expose the fissures of our bankrupt world, this pandemic will have served as a fitting apocalypse. If instead, despite its devastating toll, we return to an unsustainable world, we will not allow it to reveal anything significant to us. So we can hope that this time of telling the truth is apocalyptic. What is being revealed to us during this crisis?

In Albert Camus’s novel, *The Plague*, the epidemic is called “the great equalizer.” For Camus, the pandemic teaches that when it comes to dying, there is no progress in history, no escape from our fragility. This is what Camus meant when he spoke about the “absurdity” of life. Acknowledging this absurdity should not lead us to despair, but to a tragicomic redemption, a softening of the heart, a turning away from judgment and moralizing towards joy and gratitude. Camus is correct in a limited way: human beings are fragile insofar as we are finite (and not God). Camus did not, however, see the distinction between finitude and vulnerability, so he did not properly assess the situation. All humans are created finite and therefore fragile—but death and suffering are not equitably distributed because human-made conditions make some lives more vulnerable than other lives.

The apocalypse of COVID-19 exposes the fissures in our world that drive this inequitable distribution of vulnerability. The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis earlier this year by a white officer who dispassionately pressed his knee against Floyd’s neck exemplified one face of the white supremacist system in the United States, sparking global protests against racial injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed another face of this white supremacist system, showing the toll white supremacy exacts on health outcomes for Black and Latino communities. Death rates in the U.S. from the pandemic among Black and Latino people, according to the Brookings Institute, are higher than for white people at all ages. Black people are dying from COVID-19 at roughly the same rate as white people more than a decade older than they are.

The apocalypse of COVID-19 also exposes a global economic system that drives and deepens inequality. While global, growth-oriented capitalism has brought millions of people, especially in Asia, into the middle class, this has only been possible through a form of growth that increases economic inequality and destroys the only planet available to humankind. The fact that the stock market

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“In living through the pandemic, many of us have realized the depth of our interconnections. At the same time, however, fear from the pandemic is also deepening disconnections from one another and increasing hostility and exclusion.”
in the United States rose this summer, even as millions lost work, with meager social safety nets to protect them, reveals an economic system focused on maximizing profits for the wealthy, without concern for the increasing number of people in precarious economic straits.

Over the past months, we have witnessed the collapse of systems that seemed to be fixed and lasting. The pandemic is showing us that social systems are not fixed, but malleable. Not only my neighbors but even the neoliberal magazine, the *Financial Times*, are recognizing that dramatic change is needed, with the latter running an article on April 3 of this year with the headline: “Virus exposes the fragility of the social contract: radical reforms are required to forge a society that works for all.”

The apocalypse of COVID-19 should not only prompt denunciations of white supremacist and capitalist systems but must spur practical illustrations that other social systems and other social forms are possible. We must be able to point out lived experiences that open new forms of political imagination and chart new practical paths of action. Such alternative, embodied forms of political imagination exist. Anabaptist Jesus followers have for centuries affirmed that such alternative forms of life are possible. Moreover, those of us who have had the deep privilege of accompanying oppressed communities through MCC have seen these alternative political imaginations taking concrete form, emerging from the most unlikely places. They are Easter affirmations that another world is not just possible but real, rising from the bankrupt systems of oppression and death that produce bodies stripped, beaten, left half dead (Luke 10:25-37). Uplifting and celebrating the transformative initiatives that are inchoate transitions from a world of death and destruction to a world shaped by Easter hope is a vital form of service. In the time of COVID-19, Christ is calling us to care for the wounded and participate in the transition to a new world on its way.

*Janna Hunter-Bowman is assistant professor of peace studies and Christian social ethics at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. She served with MCC in Colombia for over eight years.*

**Nigeria**

Christians believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God and respond to his command to preach the gospel of peace and the kingdom of God to all nations. All human beings have physical and spiritual needs. The physical needs include food, health, economic and social security, peace and knowledge. The spiritual needs are salvation from sin and death and the assurance of eternal life. Service in the name of Christ during this current pandemic responds to these physical and spiritual needs.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, he sent his disciples to preach, teach, heal and reconcile people to God and to one another. The Lord was very much aware of the challenges, risks, opportunities, joy and persecution they would encounter. That is why he assured them that he will be with them always to the very end of the age. Even amidst a pandemic like COVID-19, Jesus is with us.

The Christian life is a life of service, sacrifice and joy. Christians engaged in service are believers in Jesus Christ, born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-6). Jesus told Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8, NIV). Christians engaged in service are called by and respond to God
to serve as God’s witnesses to the world, like the prophet Isaiah and Saul of Tarsus (Isaiah 6:8, Acts 9:15-16). Those who answer the call are fit to serve God in Christ. Christians who seek to serve are ready to make sacrifices and face challenges for the sake of their master, Jesus: costs and hardships must be acknowledged and anticipated.

Scripture calls us to go out in service in Christ’s name. Jesus commanded his disciples to carry out the Great Commission, sending them out to preach, teach, heal and reconcile people to God (Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18). Christians are called to imitate Jesus’ compassionate service. Jesus offers us a model of feeding the hungry and healing the sick (Matthew 9:35-37). He responded to people’s needs as he met them (Mark 6:35-44). Jesus promises that those who extend a cup of cold water to the vulnerable will receive their reward (Matthew 10:40-42).

How is the church called to serve God in Christ’s name during this pandemic?

- By prayer for people of the world, starting with the ones we know, our neighbors, the weak and vulnerable and those in power and authority, praying for salvation, security, peace, health and physical provision.
- By reaching out to people close to us with food, material comfort, finances, fellowship and encouragement.
- By giving time and money to church ministries that support the basic needs of people beyond one’s direct reach.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, our calling as Christians is to share the good news of our reconciliation to God and with one another through Jesus in word and deed.

*Moses J. K. Thliza is a pastor and leads Christian Faithful Fight AIDS in Nigeria.*

**Connecting people: MCC, exchange and the possibility of transformation**

Connection is a core human need and connecting people has been at the core of MCC’s work over the past century. Connecting people has its roots in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his example of living among us to break down barriers. As the author to the letter to the church in Ephesus writes: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:14, NRSV). When Orie Miller and Clayton Katz traveled to southern Russia (now Ukraine) in 1920 to visit Mennonite brothers and sisters in need, they were making connections on opposite sides of the Atlantic. This inter-Anabaptist connection was the beginning of an institution that has linked churches and communities around the globe through service workers, exchange programs and volunteers.

The connecting piece of MCC’s work, however, was institutionally strengthened through MCC’s experiences and work in Central America in the eighties and nineties. During this time of disasters (earthquakes and hurricanes), violence (conflicts and war) and U.S. intervention, MCC organized many learning tours, work-and-learn teams and south-south exchanges. Some were oriented toward helping with a specific construction project and
Connecting people has its roots in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his example of living among us to break down barriers.”

Connecting people toward education and advocacy, but they shared the goal of building understanding and relationships between people and churches in the Americas.

Connecting people activities sometimes proved challenging: for example, not everyone coming to clean up after a disaster or build houses as part of a work-and-learn team was eager for the “learning” component or for making connections. MCC had to invest time and resources before, during and after exchange events in order to ensure that they would be mutually transformative, respecting the skills and agency of local communities and thus making a broad and lasting impact. Together with other MCC staff, I helped create a “Connecting Peoples Manual” in 2003 that offered resources for team leaders and MCC staff as they facilitated connections that would foster solidarity and transformation through experiential education.

Unexpected moments of transformation upended expectations of who gives and who receives. For example, when the first work-and-learn team came to Guatemala to help “build houses” for widows in the Rut and Nohemi group, no one knew exactly what this would involve. The group from Canada worked hard before the trip to raise money for the houses and worked even harder for two weeks carrying cement blocks and sand from the church at the top of the mountain to the building site at the bottom. Before they left, the widows gifted them with a wonderful meal, a weaving and their gratitude. Through tears, they thanked the group in Quiché for doing the work their husbands and sons would have done had they still been alive—that is, if they had not been killed or disappeared during the years of violence. Through tears, the pastor’s wife spoke their words in Spanish and through more tears I spoke them in English. Everyone had given and everyone had received.

In my experience facilitating these learning tours, most people involved agreed that the connections formed through the tours were positive. Participants built relationships as well as houses and often broke down stereotypes in the process. Hosts and visitors learned about the “other’s” culture as well as about their own. Many in Central America felt supported by these learning tours. Learning tour participants were inspired to share what they had seen and heard with congressional representatives and churches, participate on local refugee committees, start sister church relationships or begin treating their Hispanic co-workers and neighbors differently.

Ernie Engbrecht (left), Annie Engbrecht and other members of an MCC Alberta Learning Tour group inaugurate a drinking water tap in Khijifalate village, Okhaldhunga district, Nepal, by cutting a ribbon and opening the faucet. MCC has partnered with SAHAS (Group of Helping Hands) and its community-based member organization, Likhu Demba Community Development Forum (LDCDF), to implement earthquake recovery projects in the northwestern region of Okhaldhunga district since 2016. (MCC photo/Avash Karki)
By the time MCC revised the “MCC Principles that Guide Our Mission” statement in 1999, connecting people had become acknowledged as an integral part of MCC’s mission. “MCC serves as a channel of interchange by building relationships that are mutually transformative,” MCC’s board declared, stating that a key priority for MCC was to facilitate “interchange and mutual learning between its supporting constituency and those with whom we work around the world, so that all may give and receive.”

With connecting people becoming a key priority, structures expanded within MCC that supported connecting peoples work, while country programs began adding staff dedicated to supporting learning exchanges. These connecting peoples staff routinely facilitated learning tours and work-and-learn teams while also facilitating longer-term exchanges through MCC’s eleven-month service and learning programs for young adults (SALT, IVEP and YAMEN).

Challenges and questions abound with most learning exchanges, whether they last for two weeks or two years. MCC has worked hard to address the difficult issues of mutuality, inequality and money. While not perfect, the emphasis MCC places on relationships and learning in these exchanges distinguishes these programs from many typical short-term missions experiences.

At their core, connecting experiences are opportunities for change and transformation. In our contemporary world marked by militarized borders, discrimination and hostility, we need encounters, solidarity and education more than ever. Such exchanges are key to changing our world views—our understandings of ourselves, other people, the world and God. They are key to personal and systemic transformation. We need MCC to continue to provide opportunities that help us look at new issues and places, listen to different voices, learn from each other and live in ways that create a more just, humane, sustainable and peaceful world.

Elaine Zook Barge is a trauma and resilience educator. From 1984 to 1998, she worked with MCC in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, while from 1999 to 2005 she served as Latin America connecting peoples coordinator, MCC East Coast peace and justice associate and MCC representative at Eastern Mennonite University.

**MCC’s young adult service programs and the church’s witness**

When visiting Anabaptist church leaders in various countries around the world, one routinely encounters people who share that they had participated in one of MCC’s young adult service programs, such as the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) or the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN). These MCC young adult service and exchange programs have not only equipped young adults with leadership skills—they have helped stoke passions for the church and its mission, enriching the church through mutual exchange and strengthening the church by building up future leaders. Here are reflections from some church leaders about the impact MCC’s young adult programs had on their understanding of the church and its witness.

—The editors.
In the Name of Christ

Intersections: MCC theory and practice quarterly

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Serving in Goshen, Indiana

My church experience has been one of opportunities—opportunities to develop skills, use my gifts, learn and serve. One of those opportunities came during the summers of 2002 and 2003, when I got to experience MCC for the first time through the MCC U.S. Summer Service program, a program that partners with communities of color and immigrant congregations to give young adults opportunities to serve their communities and strengthen their leadership capabilities while earning reasonable wages.

At that time, I was a student in Goshen College’s Hispanic Ministries department, attending Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor, in Goshen, Indiana. Our congregation was a mix of Goshen College students, factory workers and Spanish-speaking professors from Goshen College. In total, we represented 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our resources were very limited to support our pastor or to carry out any church outreach projects. The MCC Great Lakes office approached our congregation and asked if we were interested in participating in the Summer Service program. My opportunities for work during that summer were very limited and the offer from MCC presented a new and exciting opportunity. I had known about MCC’s work for a few years and had admired its focus on peace and justice. I had also wished to work with MCC at some point, so the invitation to be a part of an MCC program was extremely exciting.

I carried out several projects during my Summer Service assignments. They varied from organizing youth programs, building a church library, completing several maintenance projects in the church building, helping with vacation bible school and raising $7,000 for our youth group to attend the MC USA Convention in Atlanta in 2003—that last one meant organizing several garage sales, fundraiser meals and more. Not only did Summer Service give me the chance to help further my congregation’s mission, it also helped me build my leadership skills.

The biggest impact of Summer Service on my life and on my understanding of the church’s mission, however, goes beyond the projects I was able to implement during my service or the leadership skills I acquired. During the Summer Service orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, I felt a part of something larger, a bigger family, a worldwide church community that cared about poverty, racism, immigration, peace and justice and people of color, while at the same time passionate about the issues and challenges that our local church was facing. That week in Akron was my first introduction to theological ways to think critically about issues of justice confronting U.S. society, learning about inequities in the criminal justice system, efforts to promote restorative justice, the importance of striving for gender equity and more. I received an extended vision of mission, mission that cares about souls, but that also cares about how we live our lives, mission that strives for liberated communities, mission that addresses the root causes of the challenges our communities face. My view of church mission expanded to include advocacy to government. My commitment to working for the church was strengthened and my interest in peace and justice work within the church found a place where I could learn and explore more. By this time, I knew I wanted to work for the church, but I knew I did not want to be a pastor. Working those two summers with MCC’s Summer Service program allowed me to dream about new ways to serve within the church. I was given new lenses to see the church and to discern how I might join in God’s mission through the church.
In 2008, as I was finishing my studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, I was tapped on the shoulder by someone at Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor to apply for the MCC U.S. immigration education coordinator position, a position through which I have been privileged to serve the church for twelve years. In my work today with MCC, I continuously feel the sense of belonging to a global church, remembering the gratitude and excitement that I felt during my Summer Service days. I am grateful for the opportunity given then and now to develop my leadership skills, to serve the church, to work for peace and justice and to be a part of God’s mission through development, relief and peace in the name of Christ.

Saulo Padilla is immigration education coordinator for MCC U.S.

From Canada to Brazil

I will admit at the outset that there is a strong probability that my recollections and rememberings of my SALT experience are tinged with a golden hue of times past that makes everything seem better than it truly was. Through a series of highly improbable, though I would daresay providential, events in my life, I found myself as part of a team of five young adults headed to Brazil in 1993-94 to serve with MCC. That year of voluntary service was a turning point in my life which has led to a lifelong call into pastoral ministry as well as an abiding appreciation for rice and black beans.

In my late teens I had found it increasingly difficult to reconcile my understanding of faith in Jesus and what I saw in the scriptures with my experience of the local church. Perhaps it was in part my own youthful rebelliousness, but it seemed to me that people were more concerned with dogmatic expressions of doctrine and moralistic judgment than in emulating Christ. As I found the opportunity over the next few years and as I became more independent, I began to distance myself from the church and eventually ceased my involvement with Christian fellowship altogether.

Rather than leading to a spiritual life of freedom and greater depth, I instead found myself in a deepening well of spiritual malaise and aimlessness. Knowing that I desperately needed a change of circumstances, I grasped at the possibility of a year abroad as a participant in MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program. It didn’t matter to me where I went or what I would be doing—I just needed to get away! By God’s grace (and MCC’s help) I ended up going exactly where I needed to be.

Aside from the lifelong friendships and cultural appreciation that I gained in my SALT year, the greatest gift I received was the experience of true fellowship in the context of a church community. Although many of the same troubling issues were present in Brazil and the doctrinal stance was in fact considerably more conservative than in my home church community, the depth of relationship and mutuality I experienced there awakened a new understanding of what church could be.

One example of this deeper fellowship was how the church functioned as the centre for community life and relationships. At first I was slightly annoyed with how often we went to the church in those first few months. Then I began to realize that we often ended up at the church or in someone’s home even when there were no youth programs, prayer meetings or Bible studies to attend. These people wanted to be together—all the time! This lived reality of the church was not even primarily about requisite religious activities.

“...I received an extended vision of mission, mission that cares about souls, but that also cares about how we live our lives, mission that strives for liberated communities, mission that addresses the root causes of the challenges our communities face.”
This kind of church was about living a shared life in which the entirety of
the human condition was meant to be experienced within the mutuality of
spiritual friendship.

Some may say it is simply the product of a warm culture in contrast to the
relative coldness of North American relationships. Others might suggest that
when people have so few resources, then reliance on community for support is
a natural outcome. I believe that there must be more to it than that. What I do
know is that something within my spirit was transformed by my experience of
that Brazilian church community in loving fellowship with one another. And
as a result, I fell in love again with the possibility that the church is the most
profound expression of the Kingdom of God.

Carl Heppner is pastor at Fort Garry MB Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Serving in Atlanta

If I were to describe my experience in MCC’s Summer Service program in
one word, it would be unforgettable. In the summer of 2016, I received the
opportunity to work as an intern at Berea Mennonite Church in Atlanta,
Georgia. Until then, my journey to continue my education was full of closed
doors, including difficulty securing an internship, until the Summer Service
program opened its doors to me. Summer Service gave me the opportunity
to travel outside the state to Pennsylvania and spend an entire week with
amazing individuals who wanted change and to leave a positive impact on
their communities. The training week ended with a talent night with poetry
and singing that united us in the struggle of survival, the struggle of moving
forward towards a brighter future.

The greatest gift I received in SALT was the experience of true
fellowship in the context of a church community. The depth of relationship
and mutuality I experienced there awakened a new understanding of what
church could be.”

In 2010, Ricardo Esquivia, left, Colombian Mennonite and nationally
recognized peace activist who leads the peace and development
organization, Sembrandopaz, talks with MCC Seed worker Torin Thomas
Schaafsma, right, as people gather in Mampuján Nuevo to listen to a
reparations hearing. Seed is a two-year program of MCC that brings
together a group of young adults ages 20–30 from around the world
to learn, serve and reflect. Within their regional group, Seed
participants live in communities where they serve with churches
and other organizations that work to address issues such as violence,
oppression, food insecurity, access to education, climate change and
environmental destruction.

(Photography courtesy of Michael Shriver)
At Berea Mennonite Church, I helped with the Peace and Carrots program, where we taught campers peacebuilding skills and about important leaders in civil rights movements. My role as a camp director was to guide volunteers through the daily tasks that needed to be accomplished around the church. During that summer, we laid out a concrete floor and set up a fence. The most interesting thing about Berea Mennonite Church is that it is not only a church, but also a farm that is family to chickens, a pig, goats and sheep. Being surrounded by the daily work of a farm connected me with the land and the importance of not taking it for granted. Pastor John taught me that cultivating the land is the same as cultivating your spirit, your soul. If you irrigate a plant and provide it with the right nutrients to grow, the result is an amazing plant that will provide good fruit. The same concept applies to your spiritual growth—the more you learn about God, the more powerful your connection with God becomes. Having a strong connection with God helps you impact the world and look at everyone as your brothers and sisters.

My work at Berea Mennonite was energizing, but the most important thing for me was that I got to connect the volunteers with the struggles of undocumented people. I tried my best to explain how the undocumented community is affected by different policies that have banned undocumented students from higher education. I sought to spur conversations about how the church community could get involved in the fight against injustice. It was difficult to transmit this message, but I still gave it my best shot. One day, campers in the Peace and Carrots program surprised me when I gave them a small introduction on immigration. They were full of many questions and declarations like “I love my Mexican friends, I don’t want them to go”—showing me that children do not know borders, but only love for one another. The Peace and Carrots campers came from hard environments, but they still smiled and lived life to the fullest. They reminded me that it does not matter how hard life becomes, because there is still time to smile.

*Geovani Serrano served with the Berea Mennonite Church in Georgia through the MCC U.S. Summer Service Program.*

**From the Republic of Korea to the United States**

Over the course of my year with IVEP, I met many people who served in the name of Christ. Before IVEP, I thought about mission as something one does if one has enough time or money. I made excuses about not being engaged in mission, because my understanding of mission was too limited. However, after serving through IVEP, my understanding about service and mission changed. I came to see mission and service as followers of Jesus sharing with others whatever abilities and talents that God has given us wherever we are.

When I returned to the Republic of Korea from IVEP, I was committed to serving as God’s instrument of peace in my Korean context, dedicating my talents to God’s work. I sought to be God’s instrument of peace. My writings about my IVEP year and about women active in the peace movement are being published serially in Korean-language Catholic magazines. Readers have been particularly interested in my reflections on experiences with the Amish. In my current work with a Catholic publisher, I strive to live out a life of mission, sharing the words of the Lord of life.

Serving through IVEP has inspired me to be more active in working and witnessing for peace in Korea. I learned about MCC workers in Laos, Vietnam and DPRK (North Korea) who work tirelessly to bind up the wounds of
Through IVEP, I came to see mission and service as followers of Jesus sharing with others whatever abilities and talents that God has given us wherever we are.”

war and to promote peace. I have seen MCC embody mission in the name of Christ, working across Christian denominations and for all people. Moved by MCC’s example, I have dedicated myself to writing and to public speaking for peace and justice, calling people to make peace part of their daily lives and their understandings of mission. Good theories are useless unless they are connected with practice. Our mission must be to serve as God’s instruments, living out in practice the vision of God’s Kingdom. We must reflect: What will we do for peace? Where will we head as we go out in our daily lives in mission?

Now I am part of the global IVEP network. Through my involvement in this network, I have been pushed to ask myself what direction my life will go. I have learned about the painful problems other nations face—what was once distant from me has become close. I have become convinced that all Christians, including myself, are called to work for peace and plant seeds of God’s kingdom. By working for peace and striving for God’s Kingdom, we can picture futures never before imagined.

Eunhee Jang served with IVEP in 2017-2018 as a pastoral intern and life enrichment coordinator at Garden Spot Village in New Holland, Pennsylvania.

From DR Congo to the Republic of Korea

My time with YAMEN in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was a time of service, learning and growth. I taught African history at the Korea Anabaptist Center (KAC) and offered English language instruction to high school students at the Dandelion Community, while also working at a daycare belonging to a KAC church partner.

Most of the Koreans I met through these institutions grew up in a context of a country that had not had significant contact with other cultures until recent decades. I remember the times when people on a train, at church or in other places wanted to shake my hand, simply because I was the very first black person they had ever met.
One time, as I was invited to talk to a group of kids at church on a Sunday morning, I made an illustration to explain how we all are one people in God's family, no matter the color of our skin. I asked them: “When you bleed, what is the color of your blood”? They answered “red.” I continued asking: “If I were injured, what color you think my blood would be?” They replied “red.” I then asked them: “Why do you think my blood is as red as yours?” A child answered: “We can’t think of blood with a color other than red!” We all paused for one second and I told them: “See, just because I can’t speak Korean or because you don’t look like I do, doesn’t mean we are different; we are all brothers and sisters.” I thought that was a message for little children but, to my surprise, some adults came to thank me after the service for what they thought was an important message for adults to hear as well.

I will never forget one young lady, who was not a Christian and knew nothing about churches but volunteered to be my Korean language instructor. Over the course of our lessons, we learned from one another: I learned about Korean culture through my language classes, and she learned about me, my country and my culture.

The church has no greater mission than bringing people and cultures together to celebrate the wonderful diversity of our creation in God’s image. The reality of intercultural connection goes beyond words: it is lived experience. Programs like YAMEN, SALT and IVEP are the best way to break barriers of cultures, languages and races. Our differences can bring us together and be celebrated. As I said previously, what brings us together as people is stronger than what divides us. YAMEN and other exchange programs are good ways to fight racism and other forms of segregation. People fear strangers either because that is how they were taught or they have not had a chance to live with them and experience the joy of diversity.

Osée Tshiwape, originally from DR Congo, served through MCC’s YAMEN program in 2008-2009 in the Republic of Korea and currently lives in Elkhart, Indiana.

From Puerto Rico to Nigeria

For as long as I can remember, I have heard in the church that the church’s primary mission is to evangelize—to talk to others about the word of God, to preach around the world and to make disciples, as the Great Commission says. In the congregation in which I grew up, I learned the importance of missions, with a focus on teaching the word of God. I dedicated myself to planning mission trips focused on changing lives through preaching the gospel. This understanding of mission that I learned growing up isn’t wrong, but I have come to believe that it misses an essential part of the church’s mission, which is to serve people in need. When I became part of the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico, I started to see the church’s mission differently and more holistically. I decided to apply to MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program so that I would not only talk about Jesus’ love but also show it. I never thought that the way I learned about the mission of the church would change.

I spent my SALT year working as a nurse in a hospital in Nigeria, assisting about 30 to 40 patients daily. Among the patients we served, many were not Christians. If mission is simply about preaching about God’s love, then was my providing nursing care for Muslims a form of Christian mission?
Reflecting on what I was doing further transformed my understanding of Christian mission, a transformation that had started after becoming part of the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico. I began to understand that perhaps it was necessary for me to put aside what I had learned about mission and to begin to demonstrate God’s love through my profession. The meaning of Jesus’ message to his disciples in Matthew 25, that when they give food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, they are doing that for Jesus, became clear to me. To be a witness to my Muslim patients in Nigeria, I had to put aside words in order to be the tool that God would use to show God’s love.

As a church we often focus on buildings, amazing programs and beautiful messages for church members—all of which are of course important! However, during my SALT year I learned that the most crucial mission of the church is to be the hands and feet of Jesus on Earth. Only when we are “the Church that serves” can we fulfill the Great Commission, showing the Kingdom of God in every wound we heal, so that we can then talk about what Jesus has already begun to do in people’s lives through our actions. Let us remember the words of the Apostle James: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?” (James 2:14, NRSV).

Edith Rodriguez worked with SALT in 2017-2018 at the Faith Alive Clinic in Jos, Nigeria.

From Bangladesh to Canada

IVEP split my life into two periods—before IVEP and after IVEP. My identity, my calling and my understanding of the church, mission and service were completely altered by my IVEP experience—for the good.

Without realizing it, I “worked” for years at being perfectly acceptable to God. But during my IVEP year God used the way I was embraced by the communities I lived and served with to reveal the truth. One winter morning, I woke up seized by the thought that all I had to do was to respond to his love. I said yes to Jesus and repented of the years I had spent trying to earn his love. I experienced freedom in my soul and spirit. It was one of the turning points of my spiritual life, one that launched me to serve from a place of love and true identity.

During my IVEP year, I served at two placements in Ontario—the first as a teacher’s assistant to differently-abled students at a public school and the latter as a program assistant at a camp. At the first placement, I learned that it was not always necessary to see the results of my service. I had to obey, surrender and trust that God was using all that I offered for his glory. What I was doing had an eternal impact even if I could not see it. This was a key lesson that helped me overcome homesickness, confusion and the question, “Did I make the right choice by coming here?”

At the second placement, the leaders taught me the importance of being present to God, for out of being present to God would flow a love for and desire to serve others. The leaders taught it and lived it. I learned to view every act of service as a blessing, even if it was cleaning the washrooms or piloting a garden to attract wild deer. It was here in this placement that I understood, for the first time, the importance of identifying with the mission, vision and values of the organization I was serving. This has become a personal value and prayer as I embody these things in my current workplace.
I believed the words in Proverbs 16:3 even though I did not know what God had in store for me post-IVEP. Before IVEP, I only thought of serving in the church. However, I discovered that mission can also happen outside of the church. Through the people I met in Ontario, I realized I wanted to be out in the marketplace, serving the vulnerable by using my skills and abilities. This is what I am doing now; working in a manufacturing business that employs vulnerable people. All the lessons learned during IVEP are bearing fruit in this place and calling.

I can confidently say that people were the main reason for my incredible IVEP experience. I believe mission in cross-cultural settings would be nearly impossible if it were not for the body of Christ offering love and support—and that is exactly what I experienced in IVEP.

*Helena Sanbam served with IVEP in Ontario in 2013-2014 at Eden High School and Camp Crossroads.*

**From India to the United States**

The IVEP program had a big influence on my life choices at many levels. First, through IVEP I learned about and experienced the world and the global Mennonite church, meeting many wonderful people from around the world and opening me up to the rich diversity of God’s people. Second, IVEP gave me the opportunity to better understand the people who had come from other parts of the world to serve us in India. From the time I was in high school, I had asked myself: “What is it that makes these missionaries leave their comfort zones to serve others in place like India?” Serving with IVEP pressed me to ask that question about myself.

During my first IVEP assignment, my host family told me that they attended a house church. This was a totally new concept for me. I joined my host family as they gathered with three or four other families to worship together on a rotating basis in their homes. There was no pastor as such, but we together studied the Word of God and tried to learn from our life experiences. We shared how God was being faithful in our lives. Back in India, I worshipped in a big church building with up to 500 other people, so getting used to house church worship was a big adjustment. But I came to love this small group fellowship. I soon realized that in this small group we not only worshiped, studied Bible together and shared, but we also supported and helped each other at the time of need.

This part of my IVEP experience helped me to see the church from a different perspective. I learned that the church should be a place to worship, fellowship and share what we have. I felt that this was not happening sufficiently back in our churches in India. I returned to India with the hope for the church to provide more space for people to share and to support each other. In IVEP, I learned that people are not interested in church politics, but rather want to share and serve in a fruitful manner.

I also learned the importance of a sacrificial lifestyle while in IVEP. My host families, my colleagues and fellow church members witnessed to me by how they were helpful in many ways not only to the people around them but also to the people who are in need. This witness influenced me a lot. I learned to give whatever I have for others and desire to see the same in my people.
My assignment was at a SELFHELP Crafts warehouse (later Ten Thousand Villages). I unloaded shipments and priced and tagged articles from various countries. In the beginning, I asked myself, “What am I doing here? Is this the work I am here for?” As time passed by, I learned to enjoy my time working with other volunteers, from church groups to groups of college students. I listened to stories from old people and shared mine with them. I was inspired by how congregations encouraged their members to volunteer their time to support MCC so that MCC could serve people in need. Every volunteer gave their all in whatever work they were assigned. I was fascinated by their dedication to serve people in the other parts of the world. Living a life for others and thinking about other people in need are the key lessons I learned from my time with IVEP. God had a purpose when He placed me at this site, opening my eyes to how the church in India could be motivated to serve as well.


**Broadened horizons: the gift of IVEP to the church in the United States and Canada**

Since 2012, Madison Street Church of Riverside, California, has partnered with MCC’s International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) to host young adults from around the world and to engage them in the life and mission of the church. The congregation’s mission statement reads: “Becoming a community of believers intent on experiencing and sharing the renewing life and love of Jesus.” Living and working alongside IVEP participants have furthered the church’s mission within the local community while expanding and strengthening connections with Christ’s work in the broader world.

About ten years ago, a small group of Madison Street friends began to consider partnering with IVEP. The church had always been supportive of MCC, but we had never considered hosting an IVEPer. Reviewing IVEP’s goals alongside our congregational mission, we warmed to IVEP’s objectives of promoting international peace, goodwill, understanding, friendship and reconciliation, of strengthening connections with global Jesus-followers and of broadening horizons/views and correcting stereotypes and misconceptions about the Other. We wanted to help young people gain vocational skills for service in their home communities. We familiarized ourselves with information about IVEP and requested a process of church-wide discernment. Within a few months, the church approved funding and gave the green light to invite an IVEPer. Our pastor was enthusiastic about supervising an IVEPer, a couple from our church family agreed to open their home as hosts and an IVEP support team formed.

In August 2012, we welcomed our first IVEPer, a young Bangladeshi man, into our church family. Since that first wonderful year, we have invited an IVEPer every year, hosting young persons from Laos, South Korea, Bangladesh and Brazil.
As the church’s mission statement reads, we are “becoming a community of believers.” Our experience with IVEP has positively impacted our understanding and experience of community. Our IVEPers have helped us see ourselves as part of a global community of people who are different in many ways—in culture, language, ethnicity and worldview—and yet who are brothers and sisters who share our commitment to Jesus and from whom we have much to learn. As we have befriended, listened to and learned from them, IVEPers have expanded our understandings of what it means to believe in and follow Jesus. Sharing stories about their own churches, communities and cultures, they have led us to question our assumptions about church and to consider that there are other (and often better!) ways of participating in God’s kingdom than those with which we have become comfortable. When their term with us is up, we send them home with sadness that is comforted by a shared sense that they will always be a part of our church family and that we will continue to share in mission and love despite the miles that separate us. And, for all time now, whenever we hear a news report about Bangladesh, Laos, South Korea or Brazil, we listen with rapt attention, for now we have “family” there.

The church’s mission statement reflects our intention to “experience and share the renewing life and love of Jesus.” Our IVEPers remind us that Jesus is at the center of the life and love that we experience and share. In our community, where they have worked to serve low income families, Middle Eastern refugees and homeless individuals and families, IVEPers remind us that it is Jesus’ life and love that energize our participation in God’s kingdom work of hospitality, peace-building, reconciliation and compassion. In our current societal climate, in which persons from outside our nation’s borders are viewed with suspicion and even contempt, God has engendered in us missional attitudes of respect, curiosity and openness to engagement through our IVEP experience. By their very presence, our IVEPers remind us that Jesus breaks down barriers that divide humans. They have unique insights into the plight of the disenfranchised because they see situations from perspectives other than ours. (In particular, they have empathy for newcomers in our community who struggle, as they do, to gain proficiency

“Through IVEP, we participate in God's amazing work of growing understanding, goodwill and friendship across global and cultural boundaries.”

Jung Soo Kim, a 1966-1967 trainee in MCC’s Visitor Exchange Program, talks with his sponsor John Moser from Bluffton, Ohio. Kim was one of two Koreans who participated in the program which also included young people from Yugoslavia and Jamaica. The Exchange Program eventually became the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP), a yearlong work and cultural exchange opportunity for young, Christian adults. (MCC photo)
In Matthew 13:31-33, Jesus tells of a tiny seed that grows into a huge plant in which birds come to nest, symbolizing God's kingdom home for people from every nation. He follows with a story of a little yeast leavening a lot of dough, symbolizing small kingdom efforts that shape the future of all. This kingdom pattern—of small things producing big results—has been replicated in our IVEP experience. We host one IVEPer at a time, one young person with limited English and little experience, status or influence. He or she stays with us for about a year and then heads back home. This seems like a small thing. But through IVEP, we participate in God’s amazing work of growing understanding, goodwill and friendship across global and cultural boundaries. The experience changes us. It broadens horizons and views and it challenges and corrects stereotypes and misconceptions about other people. We are changed interiorly and opened to love—to love of the Other, to love the stranger who in turn becomes our friend. We learn from one another, we build relationships and God uses the experience to transform lives. We come to a deeper sense of our involvement and responsibility in a world of interconnected people. We gain another sister or brother in our church family, we help them gain skills for their service back home and we develop a broader understanding of our connectedness across the miles and for all time as followers of Jesus. Small things lead to amazing results and, grateful for the opportunity, we look forward to welcoming our next IVEPer.

Julie Weatherford attends Madison Street Church in Riverside, California.

Sharing gifts within the global church: the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN)

Since the 1950s, many young people from different countries have had the chance to spend one year in the United States and Canada through MCC’s International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP). Former participants highly value their IVEP experiences. Over the years many IVEP alumni have moved into leadership roles in their churches. As it administered IVEP, MCC received feedback affirming IVEP as an intercultural service experience while also calling for the creation of service opportunities similar to IVEP but in other continents, that is, for a program that could, for example, place young people from Latin America in intercultural service assignments in Africa.

MCC supported this idea but felt that a world-wide exchange program should not be organized by an organization from Canada and the U.S. MCC approached Mennonite World Conference (MWC) with the request to create such a program. MWC supported the vision but did not have the funds and staff to start the program. Through mutual conversations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, MWC and MCC agreed to develop the idea together, deciding that MCC would fund the program, while MWC would develop the exchange. This was the start of YAMEN.

MWC, as a global network of churches, with connections to churches and organizations around the world, was an excellent starting point for
the development of the program. MWC took time to visit churches and organizations in different countries, listening to their hopes and experiences. From the very beginning there was support from Anabaptist churches and agencies for the developing network. Anabaptist exchange programs in different parts of the world gave counsel, shared experiences and made suggestions on what this new program could look like.

One hope expressed repeatedly by churches was that this program would give young people the chance to develop skills that they would share with their churches and communities when they returned from the exchange. Another hope was to develop future leaders for the church and community.

This input formed the foundation for the development of the exchange program that came to be known as YAMEN.

In the beginning stage of this new exchange program, it became clear that starting “from scratch” is not easy. MWC’s gift to the program was its connection to churches and its understanding of the gifts and needs of churches around the world. What MWC did not have was the administrative structure to run the program that MCC had. After a three-year development period, MWC and MCC agreed to shift the administration of the program to MCC and its Global Service Learning department that also administered IVEP.

Today the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) is a one-year exchange program for young adults, operating as a joint program between Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee. The program prioritizes connecting with Anabaptist churches in different parts of the world. Participants either come from an Anabaptist church or serve in an Anabaptist church or organization (and sometimes both!). YAMEN connects people and places that otherwise would not have an opportunity to come together and learn from each other, such as Indonesians serving in Colombia, Peruvians in Indonesia and Costa Ricans in Cambodia.

YAMEN promotes a theology of service, provides opportunities to learn intercultural skills, fosters spiritual growth, instills appreciation of Anabaptist values and promotes involvement in the local and global church.”

YAMEN participant Godswill Muzarabani of Zimbabwe teaches English in Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2012. Some of the same students he teaches are part of the peacebuilding club, Mittaphab, that he works with on weekends. The Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) is a year-long service opportunity for young, Christian adults from outside the U.S. and Canada. YAMEN participants live in a new culture while serving in places like schools, farms, community agencies and daycare centers. The YAMEN program is supported jointly by MCC and Mennonite World Conference. (MCC photo/Silas Crews)
values and promotes involvement in the local and global church. Since the first exchange in 2004, 204 participants from over 40 countries have served in 35 countries. Many gifts and stories have been shared since then.

Did the YAMEN vision of intercultural sharing across the Anabaptist world become reality? Testimony from YAMEN alumni suggests yes. Yoweri Murungi from Uganda served in an assignment in Lusaka, Zambia. His many new experiences included leading praise and worship services, Bible study classes and youth ministries at the Chilenje Brethren in Christ church in Lusaka. “These experiences helped me gain leadership skills and grow in my faith in Christ,” says Murungi. “I learned to love my neighbours, to serve the Lord Jesus, to serve the community without thinking about a reward in monetary terms,” shares Felizarda Atansia Filimone from Mozambique, who served as a youth worker with Creciendo Juntos at Monte Horeb Mennonite Church, Soacha, Colombia. Diana Martínez from Colombia, meanwhile, was impressed with the hospitality she experienced in Nicaragua as an educational assistant at Casa Hogar Belén, a children’s home in Managua. “When we are able to give as well as value what others can contribute, without worrying about cultural backgrounds, nationalities, race or language,” Martínez reflected, “then we are making real the notion of being one body with Christ as the head.”

Does YAMEN have room to grow? Indeed! As we see former YAMEN participants take up leadership as pastors, program officers and administrators in the global church, we witness the impact of YAMEN. MWC is excited to continue partnership with MCC in this venture.

*Liesa Unger directed the YAMEN program from 2001 to 2004 and since 2012 has served as chief international events officer for Mennonite World Conference.*

**Responsibility “both to those within and those without”: MCC, mutual aid and humanitarianism**

Throughout its century-long history, MCC has exercised a two-fold ministry: offering mutual aid within the church and reaching out to help all in need. In MCC’s early decades, MCC leaders often cited Paul’s call to the Galatians to “work for the good of all, and especially for those in the family of faith” (Gal. 6:10, NRSV), as the basis for special attention to the needs of fellow Mennonites, even as MCC’s relief interventions provided extensive assistance to non-Mennonites. This two-fold ministry has at times generated productive tension within MCC, tension between a commitment to extend mutual aid within the global church and the humanitarian principle of making decisions about who receives assistance solely on the basis of need.

The modern humanitarian movement traces its origins to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Switzerland in 1863. The principles of non-discrimination and impartiality in the provision of assistance have been fundamental to modern humanitarianism since its inception. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, for example, highlights as part of its core principles that humanitarian assistance will be “guided solely by the . . . needs” of suffering individuals, giving “priority to the most urgent cases of distress” and with “no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions.” Other organizations engaged
in humanitarian relief—whether secular, like Save the Children, or religious, like World Vision, Islamic Relief and MCC—similarly uphold these principles of non-discrimination and impartiality, enshrined in inter-NGO compacts such as the Sphere Standards and the Core Humanitarian Standard.

In its formative years, MCC reflected both a Mennonite desire to join in this progressive humanitarian movement as a proactive witness for peace and a commitment to offering mutual aid within the Mennonite family of faith. Alongside the death and destruction of the First World War emerged a renewed passion for and heightened prominence of humanitarian relief, with the ICRC receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1917. This humanitarian spirit of service to suffering humanity animated Mennonites in the United States. In his MCC service application, Clayton Kratz wrote about his desire to serve people in need “because this great world catastrophe [WWI] has not caused me any inconvenience.” In a 1929 book commemorating MCC’s relief efforts in the early 1920s in what had become the Soviet Union, P.C. Hiebert and Orie Miller noted that for Mennonites in the United States after World War I there “was little satisfaction in just maintaining a negative position toward war”—Mennonites were seeking “an opportunity to disprove the charges of cowardice and selfishness made against the conscientious objectors, and to express in a positive, concrete way the principles of peace and good-will in which they believed.” The call for help from southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) offered the chance to express Mennonite peace convictions in a positive way: “The need there was great, little was being done, and there was the added incentive of being able to help and to work with and through those of our own household of faith,” wrote Miller and Hiebert. While relief response to southern Russia was driven in large measure by this desire to assist those in the “household of faith,” the feeding stations MCC set up in what became the Soviet Union did not only feed Mennonites, but also other starving people.

A relief distribution in 2014 by the Nigerian Church of the Brethren in Jos, Nigeria, to people displaced from northeastern Nigeria by the Islamist Boko Haram militia. (MCC photo/Dave Klassen)
MCC continued to hold commitment to humanitarian principles and to mutual aid within the church together over the coming decades. In the early 1940s, prior to the U.S. entry into the Second World War, MCC chairman Orie O. Miller wrote in a letter to MCC representative in Germany M.C. Lehman, that “Our work, as you know, is entirely nonpartisan—relief to be extended without preference as to race, nationality, or otherwise, with particular attention to relief needs among war suffering women and children.” Miller continued: “In case, of course, that there should be relief needs among the Mennonite folks of Europe, these should also receive prior consideration.” For Miller, being “entirely nonpartisan” and giving “prior consideration” to “the Mennonite folks of Europe” were perfectly congruent.

Writing in the 1940s, Mennonite sociologist and one-time professor at Bethel College J. Winfield Fretz described MCC “as a glorious demonstration” of “mutual aid in a new day,” a collaborative venture “that is much more complex than a barn raising or a husking but nevertheless a number of people working together to achieve a common goal,” with the goal being “to feed our brothers across the sea.” MCC had a dual responsibility, explained MCC board chairman and Brethren in Christ leader C.N. Hostetter at the MCC annual meeting in 1944, a responsibility “both to those within and those without.” “Within the world-wide fellowship of our Mennonite brotherhood, our duty seems clear to minister to the relief of human suffering,” noted Hostetter. Yet, he stressed, “Our responsibility does not stop with those within the Mennonite brotherhood. As disciples of Christ, we must concern ourselves about human suffering wherever it is within the range of our possibility to help. True disciples of Christ must always remain sensitive and stand ready to minister and serve.”

Robert Kreider, who helped direct MCC’s relief efforts in Europe following World War II, reflected during his service on this tension between mutual aid to the “household” or “family” of faith and humanitarian response based on need. “Our concern is that no cause of critical need among our people goes unmet,” Kreider wrote in 1947. At the same time, he continued, “Because a person has the label ‘Mennonite’ does not automatically entitle him to MCC relief aid. The Mennonite relief representatives work under the guiding principle that they must verify need before aid is given.” Kreider emphasized that “a program which is exclusively concerned with the household of faith does that household a disservice.” He explained: “If we pumped all our supplies into the pantries of [German] Mennonites they would love it. . . . But the Mennonites would come out of the war despised by their neighbors, selfish and a pretty dim Christian witness. Our strategy to get the German Mennonites to organize themselves to help their needy cases and also to help others in need—is a more ennobling experience for them.”

In 1963, MCC executive secretary William Snyder described MCC as having broadened its vision over the decades. “At times we were criticized for being too much concerned about our own people and not enough with the rest of the world,” he observed, with MCC witness “restricted primarily to the brotherhood.” While Snyder insisted that “there was always a concern for the welfare of the neighbor” in MCC’s prior relief efforts, he granted that this concern for doing good to all people had expanded over the past couple decades: “our people’s vision increased as the modes of communication improved, as they grew more prosperous, and as they become more aware of human need on the national and international level. Now we are ministering to the needs of people of almost every race and creed and we are known around the world for our ministry of compassion.”
Over the ensuing decades up to the present, MCC has remained committed to partnership with churches around the world, both Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist. Many of these partnerships represent a form of mutual aid, as MCC supports churches in meeting the basic needs of their most vulnerable members. Yet in all its partnerships with churches, MCC also encourages and accompanies churches to reach out beyond themselves to serve the broader community, with need driving the planning and implementation of MCC’s humanitarian response. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, MCC partners with Congolese Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches as they respond to the emergency and livelihoods needs of both Congolese Anabaptists and other Congolese displaced by the fighting in DR Congo’s Kasai region. In Syria, meanwhile, MCC accompanies Syrian Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches as they distribute emergency assistance not only to Syrian Christians uprooted by the country’s nine-year civil war, but to Syrian Muslims as well. The dual commitment to mutual aid within the church and humanitarian response to all in need can generate tension, as MCC’s church partners sometimes press to keep MCC assistance within the “family of faith.” That said, MCC’s church partners typically embrace the vision that an essential element of witnessing to God’s love is to each out to all in their communities who are in need, viewing mutual aid and doing good to all people through humanitarian outreach not as opposing principles but as complementary, mutually reinforcing actions.

Alain Epp Weaver directs strategic planning for MCC and previously worked for MCC in Palestine and Israel.

From left to right, Ditutu Omer (in white shirt, a member of a local relief committee) and Nzamba Luzolo, Mptutu Mwamalonga, Mubiayi Tshibambula, Bilonda Kabengele and Ntumba Bitu, who have been displaced due to conflict, meet at a piggery site in Tshikapa, Kasai province, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo). In 2019, MCC partnered with Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCo; Mennonite Church of Congo) to provide pigs and piggeries that enable food and income for displaced families living in Tshikapa. (MCC photo/Kabamba Lwamba)
Advocating for justice in the name of Christ

For more than 50 years, policy advocacy and public engagement in Canada and the United States have been integral ways MCC has carried out its mission of relief, development and peace in the name of Christ. MCC uses advocacy as a tool to address systemic causes of poverty, oppression and injustice. The advocacy network is comprised of the Washington, D.C., Office (started in 1968), the Ottawa Office (1974) and the United Nations Office in New York (1990). Building on MCC’s unique relationships with churches and community-based organizations around the world, the network is tasked with engaging decisionmakers on both national and international levels to address policies that contribute to poverty and injustice, as well as with offering proposals and affirming policies that can lessen suffering and promote justice, peace and human dignity.

This work has not been without controversy, including some Anabaptists raising concerns about how advocacy conforms to the proper role of Christians in relating to government authorities. In the years leading up to the opening of the Washington Office, MCC staff, board members and Anabaptist church leaders had hearty debates on the subject. Some preferred a “quiet in the land” approach, maintaining a strict two-kingdom theology that drew stark divisions between the church and the world. Others saw a less clear distinction between the “sacred” and the “secular” and argued that the church should instead set an example for the broader society. An MCC church-state study conference in 1965 concluded that “Where the church’s concern for human welfare overlaps with the state, in such areas as civil rights, the church will urge (1) an emphasis on just laws, which protect and uphold the human dignity of all citizens and (2) the fair and just administration of all such laws.” This approach helped lay the foundation for MCC’s future advocacy work.

Advocacy has also given MCC legitimacy on a local level, as MCC’s work in advocacy demonstrates a commitment to righting relationships distorted by war and legacies of colonialism and responding to partner realities. During the Vietnam War, recipients of MCC’s relief efforts urged MCC to advocate to the U.S. government to end the war. More recently, some partners in Palestine and Israel have expressed concern about only receiving humanitarian aid and support, stressing the importance of MCC being willing to speak publicly about Canadian and U.S. policies that perpetuate systemic injustice in the region.

MCC’s advocacy work is based on partner knowledge and experience and builds on grassroots peacebuilding and advocacy work already taking place in a variety of local contexts. Advocacy network staff meet regularly with MCC staff from around the world, who serve as a communications channel between partners and the network. Advocacy staff then pass on those communications to policy decisionmakers and to MCC constituent churches and supporters in Canada and the U.S. In some cases, the offices may speak on behalf of those who are not able to do so directly, but they function primarily as a megaphone to amplify partner concerns. These relationships give legitimacy to MCC’s voice in Canada and the U.S. An Anabaptist faith witness also informs and guides the work of advocacy, as MCC’s commitment to nonviolence and to grassroots peacebuilding form the foundation through which MCC understands and speaks into policies.
In Ottawa, the connection between MCC’s program partners and its constituent churches is a pillar of the office’s work, with this connection fueling advocacy that strives to be relational. Education to encourage advocacy is a way to share stories and lived experiences, often between churches in the global south and the global north. Through awareness raising activities like the Mining Justice Campaign and A Cry for Home (MCC Canada’s campaign on Palestine and Israel), the Ottawa Office has connected people from around the world with Anabaptists in Canada, with the goal of learning that will lead to political action. For political change to take place, Canadians must understand global connections and the impacts of Canadian policies and then take action to encourage change. The Ottawa Office provides spaces for reflection and learning, including ways of communicating with elected officials. These acts of relationship building often take place through educational resources, such as fact sheets, blog posts, student seminars and social media. However, the Ottawa Office has also facilitated direct bridges between people, such as strategic learning tours to Palestine and Israel or encouraging Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches in Canada to visit MB churches in Colombia to learn about how the churches in Colombia respond to conflict in their country, a conflict exacerbated by the presence of Canadian extractive industries.

The Washington Office functions similarly. From its humble beginning in space rented from the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the office has long recognized that it brings a small but distinctive voice to “the empire.” Congressional foreign policy staff generally welcome the opportunity to hear from MCC staff and partners, with many saying that it gives them more insight into what is happening on the ground in various countries than what they can get from news sources or the U.S. diplomatic corps. The Washington Office works closely with and values ecumenical and interfaith advocacy colleagues. But on occasion, the perspective provided by MCC’s partners has led to a different emphasis than what our D.C. colleagues are supporting.

On February 17, 2014, Tammy Alexander, senior legislative associate for domestic affairs for the MCC office in Washington, D.C., participated in supportive prayer as some two dozen faith leaders, immigrants and supporters were arrested outside the White House to protest the two million deportations under the Obama administration. This protest was coordinated by the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and the United Methodist Church, which is a partner of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition.

(MCC photo/Agnes Chen)
A recent example is the advocacy carried out by some colleagues in Washington to maintain a U.S. troop presence in Syria for the purposes of civilian protection. While understanding that perspective, MCC continues to advocate for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Syria, following the lead of our partner organizations within the country. As is the case in Ottawa, the Washington Office also devotes significant time to ensuring that church members in the U.S. are informed about U.S. policies and have the tools they need to take action.

As Christians, if we believe that Christ is indeed Lord of all, that includes the powers and principalities described in the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians. Our faith cannot be confined to the private sphere. It spills out into the public sphere as we call on our governments to implement more just and peaceful policies. This work for systemic justice, following in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, is often less obvious than sharing a cup of cold water (Matthew 10:42). But as MCC’s partners in the U.S., Canada and around the world have made clear, it is no less important.

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach was director of MCC U.S.’s office in Washington, D.C., from 2007 to 2020. Anna Vogt is MCC Canada’s Ottawa Office director.

**A theory of change for MCC’s work**

How does MCC understand change? At the level of specific education, food security, health, livelihoods, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding initiatives, a variety of localized factors help determine what will effectively bring about desired changes. So, for example, when seeking to improve food security outcomes for displaced peoples, MCC and its partners use a variety of approaches to bring about change, from giving displaced families cash disbursements to vouchers to monthly food baskets, with each of those approaches emerging from context-specific determinations about what will contribute to change in each situation.

While MCC can thus be said to have multiple context- and sector-specific theories of change at the project level, more fundamentally MCC has an overarching theory of change captured by core commitments (referred to internally as operating principles), which name key dimensions that MCC considers essential for durable change: who is involved in lasting change and where and how it comes about. These core commitments, fleshed out below, encapsulate MCC’s conviction that lasting change often requires long-term dedication and happens when all members of a community connect across lines of difference to actively participate in shaping and implementing visions for just social, environmental and economic structures.

Serve in the name of Christ: Undergirding all of MCC’s program is the conviction that when people serve in the name of Christ, change can happen, with God’s Spirit taking our incomplete and sometimes fractured attempts to follow Jesus’ example and using and transforming those efforts for the purposes of God’s reign. All of MCC’s other core commitments are rooted in this foundational commitment to service in Jesus’ name.

Accompany the church and other partners: MCC believes that local communities are best positioned to identify community assets and needs and to determine what types of changes or outcomes towards which they want to work. Local institutions and organizations within those communities that have

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*“Lasting change requires long-term dedication and happens when all members of a community connect across lines of difference to actively participate in shaping and implementing visions for just social, environmental and economic structures.”*
the trust of community members are essential to the process of identifying, planning for and mobilizing efforts to realize desired change. Specifically, churches and other local faith communities are vital actors for bringing about change: they inspire and offer hope to communities with a theologically-rooted vision of peace, justice and reconciliation; they have a lasting presence within communities and relate to networks of other churches; they mobilize and motivate volunteer efforts; and they are influential shapers of community norms. MCC thus prioritizes long-term partnerships with community-based organizations, and particularly with churches and other local faith communities, because they are critical agents for bringing about lasting change.

**Act sustainably:** MCC understands human beings to be part of, rather than separate from, God’s good creation. MCC operates from the conviction that any type of lasting change must contribute to, rather than undermine, the sustainability of the ecological systems in which all human beings, including the communities with which MCC works, are enmeshed. MCC recognizes that ecological, social and economic sustainability are interdependent and are thus all essential for enduring change.

**Build just economic relationships:** Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew, is with the “least of these” (Matt. 25:40), found among persons marginalized by economic systems. In his inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16-21), Jesus proclaims the fulfillment of the Jubilee year, with its promise of liberation from economic captivity and the radical transformation of unjust systems that oppress and exclude. Because Jesus is present and God's Spirit is at work among the economically disenfranchised, MCC understands durable change not as something done to or for the poor, but rather as led by economically marginalized communities and shaped by their strengths and visions.

**Connect people:** In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), God binds together a new people from diverse languages and backgrounds. The new creation inaugurated by God through Jesus connects people across various divides into a shared body. When people come together crossing lines of difference, the opportunity arises to learn from the rich diversity of humanity created in God’s image. From such learnings, positive changes in the lives of communities can emerge. MCC thus supports initiatives that create bridges of connection across difference.

**Dismantle oppression:** Lasting change occurs when the talents and gifts of all community members are valued and nurtured. Discrimination and oppression mar the dignity of persons created in God’s image and prevent the full use of God-given abilities. In its relief, development and peacebuilding efforts and through public policy advocacy, MCC works with partners to dismantle discriminatory and oppressive barriers so that all persons might use their talents and abilities to their fullest.

**Practice nonviolence:** As followers of Jesus, who taught his disciples to love their enemies, MCC believes that violent, armed conflict does not bring lasting and positive change. Entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19), MCC endeavors across its programs to bring about positive change by doing no harm, supporting peacebuilding efforts and integrating activities that transform conflict into its relief and development work. MCC also believes that lasting change flows from love and mutual care for one another, including “strangers” and “enemies.”
Seek a just peace: With the Psalmist, MCC understands lasting change within a vision of justice and peace embracing (Ps. 85:10). Inspired by that vision, MCC supports efforts that address the structural barriers that prevent broad participation and leadership in communities. MCC supports community-based efforts and public policy advocacy at local, national and international levels that build durable peace by naming, dismantling, and transforming structures of injustice and their legacies.

Developed by MCC’s international program directors in May 2018.

Visions for MCC’s second century of service in the name of Christ

As MCC approached its centennial year, we asked Anabaptist leaders from Canada, the U.S and across the world what their visions are for MCC’s second century of service. As we look ahead to MCC’s second century of service, may the visions offered below spur discernment guided by God’s Spirit about what relief, development and peace in the name of Christ will look like over the coming years and decades.—The editors.

Serving together as Anabaptists

Just like God realized his purpose in creation, so did he call and inspire a few with the vision to serve “in the Name of Christ” through MCC a hundred years ago where there was suffering—physical, emotional and spiritual. These pioneers were gifted and equipped with wisdom by his Spirit to function as the service arm of the church. It was with a new heart and a new spirit that the work of MCC began a century ago. Of the one hundred years that MCC has served in various parts of the world, 75 have been in India. I was immensely blessed to have worked with MCC for half of those 75 years.

We have heard, seen and experienced how MCC has delivered relief, development and peace programs—and continues to do so directly and in partnership with churches through its faithful, committed and dedicated personnel. MCC India has sought to engage India’s churches, including Anabaptist churches, as the church reaches out to deliver services to all, irrespective of caste, creed and colour. Looking back at MCC India’s long history, one can only marvel at the huge impact made on countless lives without creating dependency. MCC India has made this impact because it has strived to live up to MCC’s core values: working with all people in distress; partnering with local churches and organizations to be the ‘light’; and facilitating transparency, mutual respect and sustainability through its initiatives.

MCC India has invited churches to share, learn and understand MCC’s vision and priorities through meetings and workshops. One such partner, MCSFI, is the national body of Anabaptist churches in India and Nepal. MCC has taken upon itself to strengthen MCSFI so that the churches’ dependency would be more on local initiatives and less on MCC, even though this has been met with resistance. However, through sustained efforts, this has resulted in better and closer relationships between MCC and the churches. Through it all, MCSFI worked to strengthen its ties to its member churches, in addition to implementing social initiatives.
My role as MWC South Asia regional representative for India and Nepal has helped me better understand the challenges our churches face, as well as know how some churches are growing despite insufficient financial resources, inadequate pastoral training and challenges in identifying committed younger leaders.

During the past few years, the relationship between churches and MCC has improved considerably. More and more people in the pew in India express a better understanding of what it means to serve as Anabaptists, recognizing that Anabaptist distinctives call us to work in unity to challenge unjust systems in which we live as a minority community. MCC’s personnel need to continue working closely with churches, sharing the MCC story and reflecting with them about what it means to be a peace church in the Indian context. Furthermore, churches who in the past received much from the outside are now less dependent on those resources and are learning the hard way to be more dependent on God and local resources. This trend must continue so that MCC and its church partners work in ways that benefit both, resulting in dignity, maturity, accountability, transparency, integrity and above all love of God that permeates to and through all people, irrespective of caste, creed or religion.

*Cynthia Peacock is South Asia regional representative for Mennonite World Conference.*

**Serving others around us**

Among Beachy Amish Mennonites, the vision for service is focused on being both personal and practical. Our service is personal because we believe that all our service flows out of our love for God and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Because we love God, we reach out to serve others as an expression of our calling to represent him to those around us.

Our service is personal because we believe we are called to serve personally. While we also support others who serve on our behalf in organizations like MCC, we believe strongly that each Christian is called to serve personally and should be directly involved in meeting needs around them. We believe that personal service helps each servant grow in humility and the Fruit of the Spirit which then enhances their service even further.

Our service is personal because we believe that the best service is given face-to-face in a personal relationship with the person in need. Serving others around us is given priority over supporting programs far away in which others make the actual contact. We want to develop friendships with those whom we serve. We believe that this broadens the perspective of the servant and the served as well as provides greater opportunity to live out the Gospel in a way that impacts others most significantly.

Our service is practical because we believe that it is not so much something we do as something we are. As a consequence, we are not focused on looking for the opportunity to make the biggest impact but on the opportunities, large or small, that God brings our way. We emphasize that the “cup of cold water” given in love as Christ’s representative is just as significant in the sight of God as some big gesture that makes the news.

Our service is practical in our emphasis on meeting the needs that God presents to us at the moment, from changing a tire beside the road to bringing comfort.
along with the casserole to a grieving neighbor. Our service is practical in our emphasis on serving our community and the broader world one person at a time. We believe that loving, person-to-person service is the best way to represent Jesus to the world. Our service is practical in our acceptance that it is God who brings fruit from any endeavor, understanding that he doesn’t need us to do his work but he graciously gives us opportunity to assist God in what he is doing, much as a parent will allow his young child to “help” with the project at hand. This allows us to enter into service without needing to “get it all right” the first time, to bumble around a bit finding our way, to step out in faith even when we aren’t sure what we are doing or where we are going. We believe that a sincere love speaks Christ more clearly than a ‘perfect’ program or message can without it.

MCC’s opportunity to partner with Beachy Amish in the U.S. will continue to center around the practical opportunities to serve such as meat canning, comforter knotting and kit packing. Involvement in practical service projects such as MCC’s house repair project through the Sharing with Appalachian People (SWAP) program could be another point of contact. Beachy Amish will welcome exploring these types of practical opportunities to serve with MCC.

Tim Miller is bishop of McKenney Mennonite Church (Beachy Amish) and serves on the board of the Beachy Amish Peace and Service Committee and with the Conservative Anabaptist Service Program.

Linked by Christ’s Spirit in holistic mission

It is such a pleasure to add my well-wishes to MCC’s centennial celebrations! Countless individuals have been blessed by the ministry of MCC—those around the world who have benefitted from MCC’s relief and development work of MCC and those who have found a new measure of peace through MCC’s work of reconciliation and peacemaking. Of course, MCC has also blessed those countless individuals who have connected with MCC as volunteers.

The Mennonite Brethren (MB) in Canada are intricately linked with MCC through our governance structures and through our people. There are countless MBs in Canada who meaningfully contribute to the work of MCC as staff and as volunteers, whether by packing relief buckets, sewing quilts, promoting MCC events or helping in the many Thrift shops. In addition, our congregations and individuals gladly give millions of dollars each year to MCC’s ministries, without special giving appeals, but rather simply out of conviction about the crucial nature of the work.

Even more importantly, we are linked by the Spirit of Christ who clearly sends his church on a holistic mission—a mission of word and presence, a mission of sharing the good news of Christ and helping to relieve the hardships of life.

The leadership of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference of Churches is recognizing anew that the local church was designed by God to be at the forefront of God’s Kingdom work. We are focused at coming alongside the local church to support and empower the church to accomplish its calling and mission in its particular setting.
MCC has unequaled expertise in global relief, the work of peacemaking and reconciliation and creative development of micro- and macro-economies. Each of these areas of expertise are incredible resources which have the potential to empower each local church in its specific call. I would love to see MCC increasingly visible and active in the local church, sharing the lessons learned over one hundred years of ministry experience.

Training and equipping in peacemaking and reconciliation principles, scalable to the lives of individuals and communities in our western context, would place invaluable tools into the hands of followers of Jesus. The ever-increasing presence of refugees in our world calls for cross-cultural awareness in our contexts here in Canada as we bring the reconciling message of Christ to our new neighbours. The Lord has also opened doors to ministry among our First Nations peoples where the lessons learned by MCC on a global scale certainly apply.

Gospel mission is a key strategic priority for the Canadian MB Churches. We consider MCC a key partner in helping us take fresh and courageous steps in this area. MCC has demonstrated creative thinking and problem solving over the past one hundred years. The church in Canada needs MCC to continue to be on the leading edge of relief, peacemaking and development strategies to inspire and to equip the local church to creatively and boldly witness to the manifold deliverance our Lord Jesus brings. May the mercy of the Father, the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit carry the mission of MCC into the next one hundred years.

Ingrid Reichard serves the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches as the National Faith and Life Director.

Discerning the times

The beginning of a new century for MCC and its church partners presents a good opportunity to discern the times and assess global and regional realities, paying attention to the accelerated changes shaping these contexts. New eyes and new ears are required to see, hear and respond to the movements of the Spirit and to build peace in the name of Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his listeners to pay attention to the signs of the times rather than simply engage in weather forecasting: “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky,” he tells the Pharisees and Sadducees who sought to test him, “but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:1-3, NRSV). Jesus recalled for his listeners that secular and divine events both require the same attention. God’s presence and action animate events. Jesus underscores to his listeners that they must view the events of everyday life with new eyes, discern God’s Spirit moving through those events and then respond to where the Spirit is heading.

For MCC and the church to discern the times at the start of MCC’s second century will involve:

- Acquiring ecological awareness and valuing and respecting creation and the dignity of life. We must recognize the interrelationship between human beings and all the other beings that make up this world.
- Being committed to and respecting human rights, as well as civil and political rights based on the principles of freedom and equality. We must in turn link the principle of freedom to the principles of solidarity and responsibility.
Discerning the times means analyzing and agreeing on what is happening in our respective contexts and then aligning our understandings of mission accordingly, pointing towards the Kingdom of God.”

In their desire to do reconciliation, church communities are continually looking to do something new, regularly forgetting the past or impatiently moving on from it. But for Indigenous peoples, we believe we can only go forward as we look back.”

—Adrian Jacobs

Discerning the times means analyzing and agreeing on what is happening in our respective contexts and then aligning our understandings of mission accordingly, pointing towards the Kingdom of God. Discernment can lead to revisions and realignments that might be threatening to dogmatic and fundamentalist approaches. Yet when we listen to God’s Spirit, the church and MCC can be opened up to respond in the new and creative ways demanded by our present reality.

Alix Lozano is a Colombian Anabaptist theologian, teacher and pastor.

**Land, broken relationships and the task of reconciliation**

They don’t need something new. They need to go back. They need to remember the original call.

With a warm smile my friend lifts up a passionate summons to action as we share coffee at Canadian Mennonite University’s Folio Café. Adrian Jacobs is Haudenosaunee, a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River. Currently the Keeper of the Circle at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, he worked with MCC Ontario from 2007 to 2010 in the Haldimand Tract, nurturing conversations in congregations around the Caledonia land dispute. At the time, many Christian settlers asked: “What can we do to repair the relationship?” According to Adrian, the Six Nations response was clear and consistent—

Remember the Two-Row Wampum, and live into it.

Remember our ancient and still living covenant—its call for peace, friendship and respect.

Remember the abiding principles of self-determination.

Remember the sharing of the river of life and this land.

Remember, and live into it.

“Church communities are caught up in the dominant logic of western progress,” says Adrian, as his hands move, one in front of the other. “In their desire to do reconciliation, they’re continually looking to do something new, regularly forgetting the past or impatiently moving on from it. But for Indigenous peoples, we believe we can only go forward as we look back. And that’s why, today, we’re still waiting for churches. Waiting for them to act on what we have given—to embrace the Two Row and the spiritual covenant.”

As I listen to Adrian, I can’t help but remember the radical re-orientations of the prophets Jeremiah and Micah. “Consider the old paths.” “Has God not shown you?” You know all this! “What is good?” You’ve been told. “Do justice.” Live the covenant. “Seek the good ways,” the foundational calls. And walk in them.
In Canada and the United States, we all know why the Indigenous-Settler relationship is broken. I’m talking about the big reason. Cultural misunderstanding, lack of education, plain old ignorance and racism are all part of the brokenness of the Indigenous-Settler relation. But alongside and underlying these factors is the issue of land. Land taken. Land stolen. That has always been the fundamental issue. And that is still the issue.

What then does that mean for those of us who long to live MCC’s mission of sharing “God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ”—and to share it here? I do not think it means that our predominantly settler organizations and communities of faith can’t do good reconciliation work by taking up matters that don’t address the ultimate source of the fracture head-on. We can do indirect work, and we do—all the time. But it does mean this. Some of us, and many more of us, must focus our concerted efforts specifically on land. As two anti-colonial theorists, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, put it, if the central operation of settler colonialism—this ever-present power that usurps Indigenous jurisdiction throughout Turtle Island—is the theft and exploitation of Indigenous lands, then it’s evident: the repatriation of Indigenous land and life must be at the heart of any true decolonizing praxis. That is true sharing of God’s love and compassion.

This is not news to anyone in MCC. Moved by Indigenous nations and partners, stirred by the witness of Native Concerns and the Aboriginal/Indigenous Neighbours programs, MCC has lifted up, time and again, a series of prophetic calls that address this great and most central wound.

Remember 1987. *A New Covenant.* “We believe that basic dimensions of Aboriginal rights need to be recognized.” “The right to self-determination.” “The right to an adequate land-base.”

Remember 1992. *A Statement to the Aboriginal Peoples of the Americas.* “We promise to work for the just and honourable fulfilment of outstanding obligations related to land, the resolution of conflicts over industrial development and other areas of dissonance.”

Remember 2000. *A Statement on Aboriginal Land Rights* (released by the Aboriginal Rights Coalition, of which MCC was a part). “The focus of our joint message . . . is to invite the people of our churches . . . to support a fundamental goal of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: the provision of an adequate land base for First Nations, with sufficient resources for sustaining viable economies.”

Remember 2017. *A Response to the TRC Calls to Action.* “MCC repudiates concepts used to justify European superiority over Indigenous peoples [and land!], such as the Doctrine of Discovery.”

For decades, MCC has known what needs to be repaired for true reconciliation to happen. And with tremendous courage, it made a series of daring declarations pledging itself and the broader Mennonite constituency to that primary work of land justice.

When we look back on those same decades, we behold many beautiful efforts by MCC staff and program to flesh out these land-oriented commitments. We find MCC actively supporting the land claims struggles of nations like the Innu, Gitxsan and Lubicon. We see MCC present at the Oka, Ipperwash and Standing Let us remember our promises, not with nostalgia, not with complacency, but with fierce determination, risk-taking love and renewed commitment.”
Rock-Dakota Access Pipeline crises. We discover MCC walking with the Young Chippewa men and other landless bands. We note MCC’s hard work at the United Nations in support of the basic Indigenous rights to land and life articulated in the Declaration. And we witness MCC issuing Jubilee grants each year to support Indigenous-led reparative efforts.

There is some remarkable history here. But I am not sure who all knows this tradition and the deep promises that both accompany it and call us to even “greater works than these” (John 14:12, NRSV). In my ministry, I am lucky to criss-cross these lands some call Canada and visit Mennonite congregations all over. I regularly lift up our MCC land engagements and land promises. Most, not surprisingly, are unaware. Yet most are incredibly heartened to learn about them. When they discover this rich and even radical history, it creates space, precedent and resolve for them to do reconciliation work that approaches the most fundamental issue.

As MCC celebrates its centennial and ponders how it might partner with the church in the years ahead to do the work of reconciliation, my encouragement is for us to walk into that future by looking deeply and courageously back. Let us remember our promises, not with nostalgia, not with complacency, but with fierce determination, risk-taking love and renewed commitment. The truth is, we do not, in one real sense, need to create anything new. For sure, there are different strategies and tactics that we can and should employ to be more effective, there are better or more relevant ways to mobilize Anabaptist churches into genuine faithfulness and solidarity work. But the first and most important step is to remember. Go back to the original call and covenant. Remember the Two Row. Remember our promises. Remember those who actually took those vows seriously and paid a cost. And together, let us follow that good way.

Steve Heinrichs is director of Indigenous-Settlement relations for Mennonite Church Canada and lives in Treaty 1, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The body of Christ, the body of the world

As I reflect on MCC’s motto, “In the Name of Christ,” I want to commend MCC workers who have grappled over time with the motto and its meaning. I was on the steering committee of the New Wine New Wineskins revisioning and restructuring process in my role as the North American representative of Mennonite World Conference’s Youth and Young Adult Executive Committee. During one huge meeting in Winnipeg, Canada, I saw MCC administrators, frontline workers and some community partners literally pace around in heated debate about whether to keep using this slogan or to drop it—if it was the essence we must communicate or a stumbling block to deepening partnership across lines of religious difference. Reflecting specifically on the question of whether MCC meat can labels should bear the slogan, “In the Name of Christ,” people talked about the where, when, why and how of everything related to these five words. “The more important issue is that it was written around cans of meat, and the folks we met wanted rice and beans!” one person exclaimed. “We saw people care less about the label and get right into the turkey!” another retorted. “We never translated it, and it was unclear if the receivers could read what it said, though they asked if [the meat] was halal,” a third said. “In my day I received quite a few quizzical looks from bureaucrats with regards to these words,” a quieter participant finally admitted. “Being obviously religious got us into places we could never go otherwise,” someone added.
Words matter, not in the least because words create worlds. Christians profess belief in a God who created this precious world with words and invited humans to interact with their worlds through words and cooperation. In contrast, the prevailing creation stories at the time the Hebrew creation narrative was recorded often featured divine violence, hierarchy and forced labor as central themes in the creation of the world and the human interaction with the divine and each other. And as John 1 alludes to, our peacemaking witness—the refusal to perpetuate violence because of our commitment to following the Word made flesh —thus can be found at the very beginning of our scriptural tradition.

The debate was so heavy in Winnipeg because of deep grief for how the Christian story has been so distorted over time by those who have used violence to dominate, dispossess, control and displace. Many of the crises that MCC has responded to since its beginning have their roots in horrors done also “in the name of Christ.” Was our little part, as MCC, making a corrective to this legacy or in fact furthering it by promoting charity over justice or by needing to broadcast our perspective? My guess is there has never been a time when these topics weren’t a hot debate among MCC workers. Although it mostly occurred far away from Anabaptist meetinghouses, the debate like that which I witnessed was real church work. I hope the church (and all who support MCC) can see how service makes us do theological work, although the forms such theological work takes may be different from context to context.

If I started this article by writing about the beginning, the times now push me to speak of the end. We are in apocalyptic times, revelatory times—some say the time of Revelation. Yet apokalypsis in Greek simply means to unveil, to expose. These are indeed times where violence is becoming more obvious than before to more people than before. One initial thought is that this gives MCC the opportunity to connect with more non-Anabaptist Christians that want to make disaster response and relief, sustainable development and justice and peacemaking central to their discipleship practices. People across many denominations are catching of vision of what it means to be a peace church. What better organization than MCC to assist these Christians in living out a peace church vision that MCC has sought to operationalize for a century? I was happy to see MCC had a recruiting booth at a post-evangelical gathering last year, along with advertisement in an ecumenical magazine. It would be great for all of us to welcome the faithful from all traditions and backgrounds to serve together—it enhances our learning.

The letter at the end of our Bible penned by a political prisoner to the dispersed communities practicing redistributive justice “in the name of Christ” calls its readers to remain true to life even as the ground trembles, the oceans roar and fires engulf large areas of land. What to do now when those metaphors are featured in real life on daily weather reports as global temperatures reach record highs? As dead babies wash to shore as families flee violence? I breathed a sigh of relief when I read that MCC will focus on addressing climate change, especially naming the ways in which it accelerates violence and increases deprivation. Holding together the social and ecological dimensions of concurrent catastrophes is crucial. This holding—yet another tension to hold!—is deeply within the purview of an organization working in the name of Christ. Just as different parts of the body (1 Corinthians 12) cannot say to others that they have no need of them, we cannot say to the trees, “I have no need of you.” For trees breathe in what we breathe out and we inhale what trees exhale. The body of Christ is the body of the world. The world is being crucified at this time, by the crowds of us who cannot seem to see the possibility of
non-coercive options and by imperial systems that crush all who build grassroots power. The world rises again—and the people rise again. To serve in the name of Christ is to serve in the name of this Earth, for they are groaning together for redemption and the revelation of the children of God (Romans 8).

Even if your theology does not match the ecotheological vision I have sketched above, I think it is wonderful that both of us have a place in MCC to work together to alleviate the suffering of humans and the Earth. I would like to see MCC become even more inclusive and make more room for everyone. I had transformative experiences working on assignments and volunteering with MCC and I want all to have access to the opportunity to be at the creative edges, holding the tension of joy and sorrow, working it out between Genesis and Revelation in the grey areas where the black and white text blurs together with our tears and sweat. As MCC enters its second century, I am confident MCC will be there at those edges, but I wonder: will the church be there? I challenge the church to send more people to serve with MCC and for the church to listen even more closely to what these MCC workers have to say upon return.

Sarah Nahar (née Thompson) began as an MCCer with MCC’s Summer Service program in 2004. She is currently a doctoral student in religion and environmental studies in Syracuse, New York (Haudenosaunee traditional land).

Centered, rooted, connected

I am grateful for the invitation to offer some reflections on my vision of how MCC can partner with the church in MCC’s second century. Vision is a word that is often used today. In our ordinary everyday life, vision is most often understood to be our ability to see things clearly—to see things as they really are, not blurry or distorted. But when vision is used with reference to the future it is understood to mean our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, our desires, our wishful thinking. The following names some of my hopes and dreams for the future of MCC.

I wish for MCC to remain centered. As Anabaptist Christians, we believe Jesus is the center of it all. Before it is anything, MCC is a community of persons who are called to be Jesus-centered, Jesus-followers and Jesus-imitators. I hope that the mission and ministry of MCC will remain “in the name of Christ.” In Jesus, by Jesus, in obedience to Jesus and for Jesus must remain the center of MCC’s existence and purpose.

I wish for MCC to remain rooted and committed. I hope that MCC remains clearly and unapologetically rooted in the legacy of the radical reformers—the rich and inspiring legacy of men and women who were willing to endure hardship in order to remain committed to knowing, loving and following Jesus. These hardships ranged from name-calling and labeling—radicals, Anabaptists—to torture and martyrdom. MCC must remain rooted in and committed to the Anabaptist values, perspectives and priorities that led to its birth and have guided its ministry over the last one hundred years. Deep roots in its Anabaptist heritage will help MCC remain committed to being radical, being different and being counter-cultural.

I wish for MCC to remain connected and connecting. I hope that MCC remains a ministry of Anabaptist churches. While we acknowledge the family of Christ is one, we also acknowledge that the family has multiple families.
The Church is one; yet the Church has churches. MCC has been one way that churches can come together in ministry. In a world that seems to be increasingly fractious, MCC must remain committed to bringing together different branches of the family to serve with love and compassion in the name of Christ, who is Lord of all. To that end, it might be time for MCC to transition to a new name so that it does not appear to be only connected to one particular Anabaptist family.

I wish for MCC to remain focused. Every part of the body has a role to play. The eyes are for seeing. The ears are for hearing. The hands are for touching and holding. Without diversity and specificity of role there would not be a functioning body. MCC seeks to share God’s love and compassion for all and is inspired by a vision of communities around the world in right relationship—right relationship with God, right relationships with one another and right relationship with creation. MCC must remain focused on this vision and committed to an understanding that it is a right relationship with God that becomes the foundation for the transformation of all other relationships. While responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice are critically important, MCC must remain focused on the primary relational need of all humans—a right relationship with God.”

Alan Robinson is national director of the Brethren in Christ Church U.S. and former senior pastor of Carlisle (Pa.) BIC.

While responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice are critically important, MCC must remain focused on the primary relational need of all humans—a right relationship with God.”

Maricella Mayorga Diaz (left), one of six volunteers trained in 2015 in peace, reconciliation and conflict resolution skills by MCC partner organization Proyecto Paz y Justicia (PPJ), worships during a service at the Vida en Abundancia Mennonite Church in Chamelecón, district of San Pedro Sula, Honduras. In recent years, many residents have fled the area rife with gang violence and poverty, relocating within Honduras or making the long and dangerous trip north towards the United States border. For those who remain, the church provides a beacon of hope. (Photo courtesy of Nina Linton)
Church members of Masurura Mennonite church in Butiama District, Tanzania, gather outside for a photo after a Sunday service. The church is part of Tanzania Mennonite Church (KMT, Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania), Lake Diocese, in Tanzania's Mara region. (MCC photo/Sharon Mkisi)