

CMCL – Mennonite World Conference Presentation
May 6, 2018
Dick Thomas “Through the Eyes of Others”
Luke 13:29, Revelation 7:9-12

A Testimonial

A transformational moment in my life was celebrating the Lord’s Supper at the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly in 1972 in Curitiba, Brazil. It brought a new feeling a new meaning to the celebration described in Scripture.

I was connected in the global body of Christ---- with these sisters and brothers from many peoples, nations, cultures, races, and socio-economic groups. I knew myself to be part of this global movement----- and the deeper understanding of that transformative moment still impacts my life and my understanding of following Jesus as a global citizen.

MWC connects Brethren-In-Christ and Mennonites around the globe in a communion of over 10,000 local Anabaptist congregations.

History

The first MWC was held in 1925 in Basel, Switzerland. It was a small event commemorating the 400th anniversary of the beginning of Anabaptism and included one person present from the USA. The first assembly held outside of Europe was held in Goshen Indiana and Newton, Kansas in 1948 and the first assembly in the global South was held in Curitiba, Brazil in 1972. The last assembly was Pennsylvania 2015 and the next assembly in 2021 will be in Indonesia.

The Mennonite or Anabaptist World

There are 2.1 million members in 87 countries with 1.5 million officially participating in MWC. These represent 105 Mennonite and BIC Churches meeting in 10,000 congregations. 20% of the MWC members live in North America and Europe.

MWC by continent

Africa	50%
Asia	25%
Europe	1%
Latin America	7%

Largest Churches

Ethiopia

MB Church of India

Congo

MWC Today

5 Minutes MWC 2017 Year in Review --A video

<https://mwc-cmm.org/content/mwc-year-review-2017?language=en>

What MWC Does

Every six years, Anabaptists from around the world gather for a global Assembly to experience powerful international worship and fellowship - through inspirational singing; Bible study; friendship groups; a global village with music, art and food from around the world; learning tours; sports and other activities. (Assembly scattered and gathered) Produced Seven Core Convictions that unite Anabaptists around the globe—Faith and Life Commission, which is an ongoing commission of MWC.

YABS – Young Anabaptists –Plan a gathering in conjunction with the MWC Assembly and visit youth events and Mennonite Schools.

Dialogues for Christian Unity – the conversations with Catholics and Lutherans was mentioned in the video

Deacons Commission –visit and show solidarity and care for places where anabaptist congregations are experiencing a difficult situation. It pays special attention to the welfare of Mennonite World Conference churches worldwide, especially during difficult times, walking alongside them and connecting needs with resources

Produce materials for congregations to celebrate World Fellowship Sunday

Manage a global Church Sharing Fund

Mission Commission and Peace Commission and an emerging educational network

Why for us in USA, Lancaster and CMCL

Cesar Garcia the General Secretary of MWC with offices in Bogota Columbia says that “we see Jesus most clearly when we also see Jesus through the eyes of others.”

Those of us who are basically self-sufficient in Lancaster need to see Jesus through the eyes of others to more fully know who Jesus is in the world today.

In his book “Thank-you for Being Late”, Thomas Friedman writes about Periscope whose CEO says that their mission is “enabling everyone to explore the world through someone else’s eyes and in so doing to build empathy and truth – empathy by putting people into vivid contact with each other and their circumstances-----reminded me of the value of MWC.

From the MWC webpage: “Members of Mennonite World Conference live in different countries, speak different languages, and worship in different ways, we are part of the body of Jesus together. Together, we experience Christ in a more complete way. And together, we’re doing what none of us could do alone.

As a world-wide community of faith and life, we break down boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender, and language. “

With recent elections the United States has embraced an America First as an approach to global relations, and the US is the world’s foremost empire ---we especially need be in communion with sisters and brothers in Congo, India, Mexico, Kenya, and the other 83 countries where there are Anabaptist congregations if we are to resist the seductive forces of nationalism, Xenophobia, the corruption of wealth and power, racism, and the myth of individualism and self-sufficiency. If we are to be the beloved community we need to receive the gifts other Anabaptist conferences around the world have to share with us so together we can more fully become the authentic body of Christ present in the world today.

Not only do we need to see Jesus through the eyes of others I would make the case that we need to see ourselves and our country through the eyes of others. For example -- How does US policy look and impact our sisters and brothers in the global South? We

need to hear from persons in the global South in their own words.....It has been expressed that when the United States coughs we catch a cold---

Today, we can communicate in so many ways –and yet the real person to real person remains so important. In the NT Paul the apostle would write and also say I will come to be with you. It is again in the words of scripture “when we gather together that the Spirit is in our midst” ...and we see Jesus most clearly and understand what it means to be the body of Jesus present in the world today as we see Jesus through the eyes of others --- MWC provides a vehicle for a global Anabaptist communion---for a global Anabaptist identity and for mutual care, prayer and support.

When I was moderator of MC USA I represented MC USA at every three-year gathering of the MWC General Council. ---meeting in 2012 in Basel, Switzerland. My recollection is that there were three reps from MC USA----in a large gathering of General Council members. Helped put our place in the total Mennonite World into perspective.

At that General Council meeting I also became aware that the other contentment’s work together in ways that is simply not true in North America-----a challenge for us to consider!

The Poet Robert Burns ---would to God the gift God give us to see ourselves as others see us.... Among the many gifts that Mennonite World Conference gives us there are two that seem to me to be especially important:

The gift to see ourselves more honestly in the world

The gift to see Jesus more honestly in our world today.

These two gifts through MWC enable us to more faithfully walk in the way of Jesus Christ as reconcilers in our communities, country and world. Praise be to God!