

## One meal per member per year to MWC?

On June 24, 1924, the Conference of South German Mennonites issued a resolution calling on “all Mennonite congregations in the world to join in a celebration of our 400 years of fellowship together.” The resolution was warmly received. From June 13-16, 1925, representatives from Mennonite groups in seven countries gathered at the Nußbaumer Vereinshaus in Basel, Switzerland, for a time of worship, reporting and informal sharing. The topics of the gathering reflected the issues of the day: the lingering effects of a devastating world war, contemporary theological currents, the challenges of immigration and the difficult circumstances Mennonite brothers and sisters were facing in the newly created Soviet Union.

The event marked the beginning of Mennonite World Conference.

**Much has changed since 1925.** The number of Anabaptist-Mennonites has grown from 225,000, almost all of whom lived in Europe and North America, to 2.1 million, with the overwhelming majority residing in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Today, 102 groups from more than 60 countries are affiliated with MWC, and the headquarters of the organization born in the Nußbaumer Vereinshaus are now in Bogotá, Colombia.

To the extent that it is known among North American Mennonites, MWC enjoys a strong reputation. Many have attended an MWC global assembly in Calcutta (1997), Bulawayo (2003), Asunción (2009) or Harrisburg (2015). Our congregations have been grateful for the international hymns shared in these assemblies that have found their way into our worship services and songbooks. During the past decade, MWC has represented our global fellowship in ecumenical conversations with Lutherans, Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. Since 2005, more than 100 young people have participated in the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN), building relationships among congregations and conferences in the global south. MWC has provided a framework for the Global Mission Network (72 mission agencies from 35 countries) and the Global Service Network (56 service-related organizations from 26 countries), helping churches collaborate in a global witness of word and deed.

As we struggle in North America with questions of unity and identity, there is something comforting about the fact that Mennonites and

Brethren in Christ from around the world have a point of reference for shared worship and witness.

Yet despite its global scope and ambitious vision, MWC’s organizational structure remains modest. Most of its 18 staff members, working in seven different countries, are part-time. Its four commissions—Deacons, Peace, Mission, and Faith and Life—have very small program budgets. And like many church-related organizations, MWC struggles to balance its vision and expectations with the reality of limited resources.

Much of MWC’s operational support comes from member contributions based on a “fair share” formula pegged to the relative size of the group and the wealth of the country—in simple terms this amounts to the cost of one meal per member each year.

In light of the fact that most Mennonite member groups in North America do not pay their “fair share,” consider the following activities your congregation might pursue as a way of strengthening its relationship with MWC and the global Anabaptist faith community.

**1. Join in World Fellowship Sunday** (Jan. 22 this year): Each year, use the worship resources provided on the MWC website to celebrate your participation in a global fellowship; designate that Sunday’s offering for the work of MWC.

**2. One lunch offering:** If every member of MC USA contributed the amount of one meal to MWC each year, our church’s “fair share” contribution would be covered. Host a simple meal in your congregation or designate a day for prayer and fasting together and make a contribution to MWC.

**3. International Songfest or Ethnic Food Festival:** Join other congregations for an evening worship service of international food and music. Invite groups from diverse musical backgrounds to share their talents; sing songs from MWC Assembly songbooks; host an international food potluck; take an offering for MWC.

**4. Prepare for Indonesia 2021:** Host a yearly fund-raising event in which you donate 75 percent of the money to the ongoing program of MWC and 25 percent to a congregational fund that will support at least two representatives from your congregation to attend Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

You are part of a global family of faith. Help MWC continue its work in strengthening our witness to the world by building bridges across countries, cultures and conferences. 



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