

Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

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Bearing Witness publishes MWC interviews

During [Mennonite World Conference Assembly](#) last summer, over twenty individuals sat down in front of our cameras to share stories from their lives of “risk, opposition, suffering or sacrifice in the way of Christ.”

The videos and stories resulting from these interviews can now be found in a new section on the Bearing Witness Stories Project website (www.martyrstories.org/

[category/interviews](#)).

Although the Bearing Witness Stories Project is primarily focused on sharing stories of costly discipleship, MWC Assembly presented a unique opportunity to hear testimonies representing a broader range of faith experiences.

The recorded stories span the globe, creating an inspiring portrait of everyday Anabaptist faith and God’s faithfulness in the

midst of challenge and difficulty.

Each individual story is available in video and text formats, allowing for an even deeper connection with the emotion and conviction that ground these testimonies.

The stories lend themselves to use in multiple settings—from personal devotions to congregational worship and Sunday School classes.



“No matter how difficult the situation you are in, it is worth the cost to follow Jesus Christ.”
-Lucy Roca Caballero, Colombia and Canada



“This is something that we embrace. That we are not to fight with one another, but to live in peace with another.”
-Richard Rancap, Philippines



“Maybe people think persecution is always negative, but for us we learned how to depend on God while our church was closed.”
-Adi Walujo, Indonesia



“Though we are already Mennonites in name, we are learning how to be real peacemakers and what it means to reconcile.”
-Olga Rubel, Ukraine

GAP Results to be Published

The [Global Anabaptist Profile](#) (GAP), an extensive three-year project supported by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA), is nearing completion.

Implemented among 24 member groups of [Mennonite World Conference](#) (MWC), the survey was completed by 18,299 individuals representing 403 congregations on five continents.

The ISGA plans to publish a full-length re-

port near the end of 2016, featuring individual profiles of each conference as well as a composite analysis of all participating groups.

The conclusions of the GAP identify certain areas of significant commonality within the global church, as well as highlighting major differences.

Overall, the survey found that the differences between the churches of the “Global North” (North America and Europe) and

those in the “Global South” (Latin America, Africa, and Asia) are more important than differences related to denominational affiliation.

In this issue of *Rhizome*, we are previewing the profile of the Convention of the Mennonite Evangelical Churches of Nicaragua on page 3. A more in-depth look at the GAP’s findings will be published in the October issue of MWC’s [Courier](#).

Conferences participating in the GAP:

- Argentina (Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina)
- Brazil (Aliança Evangélica Menonita)
- Canada (Brethren in Christ General Conference)
- Canada (Evangelical Mennonite Conference)
- Colombia (Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia)
- Congo (Communauté Mennonite au Congo)
- Congo (Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo)
- Ethiopia (Meserete Kristos Church)
- Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden)
- Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland)
- Guatemala (Iglesia Evangelica Menonita de Guatemala)
- Honduras (Organización Cristiana Amor Viviente)
- India (Bihar Mennonite Mandli)
- India (Conference of the MB Churches in India)
- Indonesia (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa)
- Malawi (BiC Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu)
- Nicaragua (Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas)
- Paraguay (Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet)
- Paraguay (Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays)
- Philippines (The Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines)
- South Africa (Grace Community Church)
- The United States (Brethren in Christ General Board)
- The United States (U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)
- Zimbabwe (BiC Ibandla Labazalwane kuKristu eZimbabwe)

Anabaptist family devotional guide enters testing phase

A devotional guide sponsored by the ISGA and focused on Anabaptist faith practices is now in the hands of young families for a trial run.

Organized around ten Anabaptist faith practices, the guide is intended to serve as an easy-to-use resource for families seeking to nurture faith development in their preschool and elementary-aged children.

Each section includes scripture readings,

reflection questions, prayers, stories from both the *Martyrs Mirror* and the contemporary global church, and interactive activities.

Lisa Weaver—elementary school teacher, author, and member of Madison Mennonite Church—worked with Elizabeth Miller from the ISGA in developing the guide. They hope the feedback from families will help in strengthening the guide for broader use.



“Bible Reading” by Han Lee. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

CONVENCIÓN DE IGLESIAS EVANGÉLICAS MENONITAS DE NICARAGUA

Congregations: 115 | Members: 5,282

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

- The average size of congregations in CIEMN is 45 members.
- Of those who participated in the GAP, seventy percent were women and 30 percent were men—this is the highest percentage of women of any GAP church in North or Latin America.
- Fifty-three percent of members reported living in rural communities and 47 percent in urban areas.
- The average age of respondents is 43 years and 59 percent of women are within childbearing age (18-45 years).
- Seventy-nine percent have not completed a high school education. Twenty-one percent are high school graduates and 5 percent have graduated from college.
- Only 30 percent grew up in a home where one or both parents was a member of a congregation in CIEMN.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents were baptized in a congregation of CIEMN.

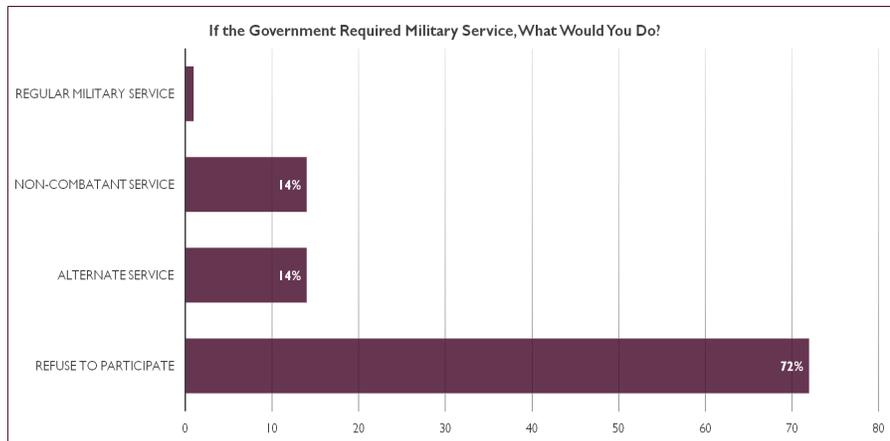


Figure 1. If the government required military service, what would you do?



"We need to learn of the experiences of other brothers and sisters in the global church family, recognizing that we each have weaknesses and strengths."

-Marcos Orozco, GAP research associate and former president of CIEMN

Marcos Orozco shared his reflections on CIEMN’s overwhelming rejection of military service: (shown in fig. 1)

“In 1983 the new Sandinista government in Nicaragua imposed mandatory military service for the first time in Nicaragua’s history. It took us by surprise. Neither the church nor its leaders nor its young people were ready to face this new challenge.

The young people were taken against their will and obliged to serve their military service because the government did not offer alternative service.

For us as a peace church it was a very difficult situation. Some of our young people died under these circumstances and others were taken to prison; still others fled the country, leaving behind their families, possessions, studies, etc. Three church conferences petitioned government for conscientious objector status, but the government ignored us.

Our convictions are very strong on this point. War has been so devastating [to our country]. Our young people don’t want to be a part of this.”

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

By John D. Roth, director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism



At a recent Sunday morning in my home congregation, Elijah and Priscillah Metekai, longtime members of our church, invited everyone to enjoy hot tea and a

few other traditional Kenyan delicacies following the worship service.

For nearly a decade, Elijah and Priscillah have been working tirelessly, alongside their regular jobs, to support villagers from their home community of Kimuka in Maasailand, Kenya.

The primary focus of their efforts has been on education, especially assisting needy students with school fees, helping women learn skills that can supplement their incomes, and strengthening the rich cultural traditions that have long been part of Maasai identity.

In many settings during the past years, Elijah and Priscillah have shared with our congregation stories from their village: reports of drought and celebrations of rainfall, concerns about ethnic tensions during a national election, the completion of a well, pictures of joyful schoolchildren who had just received new textbooks.

Over time, our congregation has developed a sense that in some small but tangible way, we are connected with Kimuka. Clearly, we are not experts in Kenyan history, politics or culture, and we have no grand vision of responding to all of the challenges the people in Maasailand are facing.

But Elijah and Priscillah, along with their two children, are deeply embedded in our community—we care about Kimuka, in part, because they care about Kimuka. They are a bridge that has opened up a part of

the world to us that we otherwise would never have known.

And we are joined to other parts of the global church as well. Right now, four young people associated with our congregation are serving in three separate assignments in Bolivia. Another young man has been working with Jubilee Partners in Comer, Ga., in a special outreach to newly arrived immigrants.

International students, retired missionaries and former service workers in our congregation remind us of a dozen other connections to the world.

But the amazing is that my congregation is not unique.

Traces of the global Anabaptist fellowship are all around us.

A [survey conducted by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism](#) at Goshen College (Ind.) in 2014 revealed that 40 percent of congregations in Mennonite Church USA have some kind of special relationship with a sister congregation outside the United States.

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents have members in their congregation who have served with Mennonite Central Committee; 55 percent have members who have served with a Mennonite mission agency. On any given Sunday, Mennonite churches in the United States will hold worship in at least two dozen different languages.

Our connections with the global church are also evident in local conferences—not just on the east and west coasts, where immigrant Mennonite congregations are flourishing, but also in the Midwest.

In the mid-1990s, for example, Illinois Mennonite Conference collaborated with the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina in a partnership called Arm in Arm. Initially the focus of the partnership was to support Argentine Mennonite congregations in an aggressive program of church-planting in the Patagonia region.

But as relationships deepened over time, participants began to ask whether the mission-minded Patagonians could help inspire a renewed commitment to local missions back in Illinois. So in 2004, Arm in Arm invited Juan and Amaris Sieber to spend time with the churches of Illinois conference, encouraging and equipping them in a sustained initiative focused on church planting.

Separated as we are by geography, culture and language, it is sometimes easy to think of the global church as a distant abstraction. Yet traces of the global Anabaptist fellowship are all around us.

In the coming weeks, I would challenge you to:

- Make a list of all the individuals in your congregation who have had a significant connection to a country outside North America.
- Create a space in your worship to name and to honor their insights and experiences.
- Ask them to reflect on similarities and differences in worship style, interpreting Scripture, collecting the offering, sharing testimonies or simply bearing witness to the good news of the gospel.

The global church is already here, hidden in plain sight.

A version of this editorial was originally published in the June 2016 issue of [The Mennonite](#).

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
GLOBAL ANABAPTISM

Goshen College
1700 S Main St
Goshen, IN 46526

Director: John D. Roth
Communications/Project Manager:
Elizabeth Miller
www.goshen.edu/isga