

Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

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Global Anabaptist Profile Completed

After more than three years of work, the Global Anabaptist Profile, a survey of 24 member conferences of [Mennonite World Conference \(MWC\)](#), is complete.

The ISGA published the full report of the GAP in January and delivered it into the hands of Mennonite World Conference leaders in February, where it was received with widespread interest.

Structured around Mennonite World Conference's "Shared Convictions," the data gathered by the Global Anabaptist Profile survey provides church leaders with basic demographic information along with data on how believers live out their commitment to be followers of Jesus Christ.

The most significant differences in results tend to highlight the contrast between MWC churches in the Global North with those in the Global South.

MWC churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, for example, are younger than those in Europe and North America; they tend to

place a stronger emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and their worship styles tend to be more expressive.

Yet potential fruits of the Global Anabaptist Profile go far beyond these general observations.

reconciliation and peacemaking; commitment to service; a view of the church as community—the survey revealed widespread agreement among churches in both the Global North and the Global South.

Second, the survey provides church leaders with specific information regarding their own groups.

Most of the groups participating in the Global Anabaptist Profile had never taken part in a church member profile. This was their first opportunity to have a systematic overview of basic information about members, including beliefs and practices.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Global Anabaptist Profile provides a framework for informed conversations

among MWC member churches about specific beliefs and practices, especially where the study has revealed similarities or differences.

Find the full report, including individual conference profiles, on the ISGA's website: www.goshen.edu/isga/gap.



Global Anabaptist Profile:

Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches

CONRAD KANAGY, ELIZABETH MILLER,
AND JOHN D. ROTH



Online Library Serves Latin American Seminaries

The Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) have collaborated in the creation of the [Biblioteca Digital Anabautista \(BiDA\)](#), a digital library of Anabaptist theological resources in Spanish found at [biblioteca.org](#).

geographical location.

“I am sure that [BiDA] will contribute to strengthening and expanding the biblical and theological education programs of our institutions,” said Willy Hugo Pérez, dean of the Latin American Anabaptist Seminary (SEMILLA).

John Driver. SEMILLA has also approved the digitization of all relevant material published by SEMILLA-CLARA, the primary publisher of Anabaptist materials in Latin America.

Over time BiDA hopes to expand its offerings to include resources on Anabaptism, context analysis, Biblical studies, church history, Christian ministries, peace and justice, and theology. The library will also resource other Anabaptist initiatives in Latin America, such as Sister Care workshops.



Hosted by [AnabaptistWiki.org](#), the library supports a variety of Spanish-speaking theological training centers and seminaries collaborating with Mennonite Mission Network to establish online study platforms for their students.

As these institutions experiment with online courses, it will be important to have academic materials in digital formats that can be easily accessed by students, no matter their

In cooperation with SEMILLA and the Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano, AMBS and the ISGA will facilitate the digitization of materials through Internet Archive, a non-profit group that converts printed materials into a professional digital format.

Initially AMBS and the ISGA will focus on digitizing material currently housed at the Mennonite Historical Library (Goshen College) and AMBS, particularly the writings of

Theological Training Centers and Seminaries Served by BiDA

- Seminario Anabautista Latinoamericano-SEMILLA (Guatemala)
- Centro de Estudios Anabautistas-Semilla (Mexico)
- Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia
- Centro Bíblico Teológico (Colombia)
- Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (United States)

ISGA Receives Schowalter Grant for Translation Projects

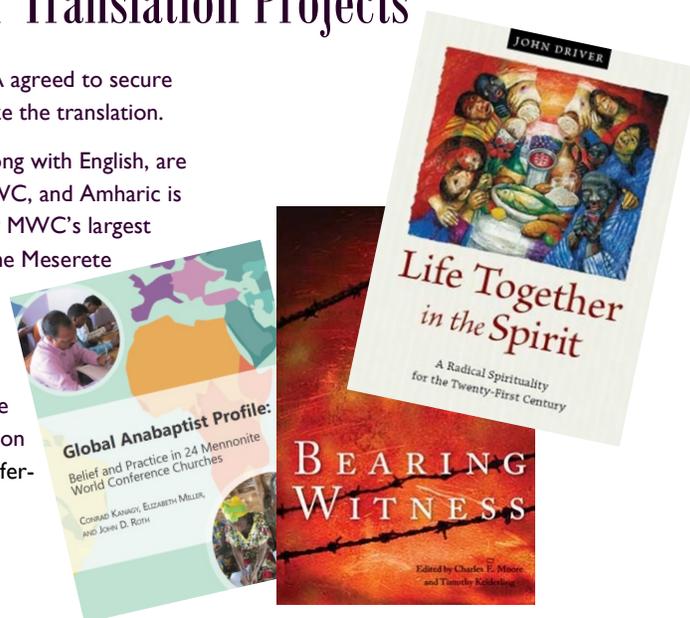
Recently the ISGA received a \$20,000 grant from the Schowalter Foundation to translate three works of significance to global Anabaptism into four different languages—Spanish, French, Amharic, and either Hindi or Bahasa Indonesia.

Mennonite World Conference expressed an interest in offering [Life Together in the Spirit](#); [Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship](#); and [Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches](#) to their member

churches, and the ISGA agreed to secure the funding and organize the translation.

Spanish and French, along with English, are official languages of MWC, and Amharic is the language spoken by MWC's largest member conference, the Meserete Kristos Church of Ethiopia.

Once completed the translated works will be available for download on Mennonite World Conference's website.



Bearing Witness Stories Project Feature

By Adi Walujo

The churches I work with are in a rural area. Several years ago, right after our Easter celebrations, a group of the Muslims came to the church compound.

They pulled out a paper and blocked the door of our church, saying that we were not allowed to use our church building!

We were very surprised, because most of our church members come from a Muslim background and all of them have family in the broader community. Some of the individuals who blocked our church that day even had family members in the church. So we did not know why they closed our church.

As a pastor, I encouraged our church members to continue to attend Sunday worship, even if it wasn't in the church building.

Instead, we met for worship in the yard of the church compound. Even in the rainy season, we kept worshipping with umbrellas and a plastic cover over our heads.

During this time, church members gathered together to pray. We said, "God, we need you to help us deal with the community. Help us know how to talk with the Muslim leaders."

Some other church leaders and I tried to communicate with the Muslim leaders. We went to them to ask why they had closed our church building. But they did not have a good answer for us.

But then something surprising happened.

On our church property is a well that supplies water for the community. It is not only for Christians but for anyone in the community that needs water. In fact, most of the people who use the well are Muslim. So even though they persecuted us and closed our church building, the water from our well was still running.

Those people who consumed the water from our well day after day told the Muslim leaders that we had not cut them off from the



water, even though we were being persecuted by Muslims.

The water was still running to Muslim families.

That had a good impact on our conversations with the Muslim leaders. Eight months after our church was closed, we had a special gift from God.

The Muslim leader spoke to me and said, "Brother, you Christians are good people. We realize that you are a part of the community. Although we closed your church, the water from your well is still running. It gives life to our people in the community."

And then he said, "I apologize. We decided to allow you to use your church building again to worship your God."

Maybe people think persecution is always negative. But for us we learned how to depend on God while our church was closed.

And God opened the door for us to have our church building again! The Muslims even allowed us to put a cross on our church building to signify that it is a church.

We are a peace church, but that doesn't mean we have to just be quiet. We have to be an active part of the community and to love them.

In facing persecution with love, we grew—our faith grew and our relationships with Muslims grew.

Adi Walujo is a pastor in the GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa) or the Javanese Mennonite Church in Indonesia. His story was originally featured on the Bearing Witness Stories Project website (www.martyrstories.org).

Where in the world has the ISGA been?

- [Renewal 2027 event in Augsburg, Germany](#) (Feb 12)
- Global Anabaptist Profile report to MWC Executive Committee (Feb 13)
- Bearing Witness Stories Project Steering Committee (Feb 25)
- John D. Roth, "The Global Anabaptist Movement and its Meaning in the 21st Century," Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia (Mar 17)

WITNESS AND RESISTANCE

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

On January 24, 1982, leaders in the Marxist government of Ethiopia, who had seized power from Emperor Haile Selassie six years earlier, initiated a series of restrictive policies against the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), a renewal movement of some 5,000 members that had emerged out of Mennonite mission work begun in the mid-1940s.

In the weeks that followed, the government nationalized numerous MKC properties, imprisoned all six of its ordained leaders, froze congregational bank accounts, forbade public worship, and demanded that church members participate in public patriotic rallies.

The aftermath of that story is relatively familiar to North American Mennonites. Rather than fading away, the church flourished during the years of persecution, adopting a host of new mission and leadership strategies as an underground movement. By the time repression came to an end in 1991, MKC had grown to 34,000 baptized members.

That growth would continue in the following decades so that today MKC claims some 375,000 members, making it the largest national group in the entire Anabaptist-Mennonite global family.

Less well-known, however, are the details of how MKC members adapted to the new context of government hostility. Recently, Brent Kipfer, a doctor of ministry student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, completed a thesis focused on the nature of MKC leadership during the Ethiopian Revolution.

Drawing on extensive interviews with 24 MKC members, Kipfer's description of their strategies of witness and resistance are relevant for all Christians, including those living today in the United States.

Under the revolutionary government, MKC members faced a relentless barrage of tactics pressuring them to conform, including

interrogations, surveillance, false accusations, social ridicule, harassment by hostile mobs, economic threats, forced participation in patriotic rallies, and even arrest and execution.

MKC members did not all respond to these pressures in the same way. But patterns of resistance emerged. And ultimately the church not only survived, but it flourished.

One key theme was a very clear sense of the spiritual foundations of resistance. When public worship was forbidden, MKC quickly adapted to form cell groups of 5-7 people, who gathered secretly in homes for regular Bible study, prayer and mutual support. These groups—joined by a network of lay leaders and a shared curriculum of discipleship training—were constantly growing and dividing as they welcomed new believers and trained new leaders.

Despite persecution the MKC witness was public as well. Sometimes it was as simple as a motto (“Live the whole day fearing God”) posted visibly on the wall of a home or place of business. Some members made it a point to pause for prayer before a meal in public settings or pinned a cross to their clothes. Sometimes, when forced to attend Marxist indoctrination classes, MKC leaders would listen carefully to the arguments and offer critical rebuttals.

MKC members explicitly rejected slogans such as “Ethiopia first” or “the revolution is above everything,” insisting that loyalty was “first to Jesus and then to country.” Composing and singing new songs was a form of resistance to the ever-present revolutionary chants.

When MKC member Jazarah was forced to participate in patriotic events, she always kept a purse in her left hand and an umbrella in her right hand so she would not have to raise her hand with the crowd. “I went through all those years without saying a slogan,” she reported.

MKC members soon came to regard persecution as a crucible for spiritual formation. “We learned through persecution,” said Desta, “that if you live a holy life ... you will face suffering of one type or another.” Virtually every member also recalled a moment when they were no longer afraid.

Zere, for example, who was initially hesitant about hosting cell group meetings in his home, testified that after three days of prayer and fasting, “I realized that God's presence, God's glory, was really surrounding us and that we should not be afraid of any coming danger.”

According to the Global Anabaptist Profile nearly 20 percent of Mennonite World Conference members “often” experience persecution. Mennonites in the U.S. cannot claim to be included in this number. But recently U.S. citizens were asked to participate in a National Day of Patriotic Devotion where the slogan “America First” was frequently invoked, and nationalist pressures are mounting.

As lines of loyalty, identity and allegiance in the U.S. come into sharper focus, MKC brothers and sisters may have much to teach us about witness and resistance. Are we ready to listen? Are we ready to consider the spiritual dimensions of resistance in our own uncertain political context?

A version of this editorial was originally published in the March 2017 issue of [The Mennonite](#).

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