

Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

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Global Research Symposium at Goshen

In late spring, nearly 20 professors, mission workers, pastors, and graduate students from around North America and beyond participated in the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Research Sym-

odology. However, the themes of identity, mission, church life, ecumenism, and the role of Mennonite Central Committee in both Africa and Latin America received special attention.

hope these interdisciplinary conversations can strengthen a sense of vocation and vision among younger scholars by connecting them with older colleagues.” “Our hope,” Roth continued, “is to



Front Row: John D. Roth, Cari Friesen, Emily Welty, Jan Bender Shelter, Pablo Kim, Elizabeth Miller, Wendy Urban-Mead, John Eicher. **Back Row:** Anika Fast, Jamie Pitts, Wilbert Shenk, Joe Sawatzky, Bruce Yoder, Jeremy Rich, Brent Kipfer, Ben Goossen.

posium. From May 30-June 1, this diverse group of scholars gathered at Goshen College to present and discuss current research on the history, context, and theology of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. Several Goshen College and AMBS professors and missiologists also contributed their insights and questions.

Research topics varied in subject, discipline, and meth-

“Repeatedly,” said participant Wilbert Shenk, “we have heard the need for groups in the global church to pursue the humble task of preserving the records and to encourage the storytellers in their own traditions to make their voices heard.”

According to ISGA director, John D. Roth, a central goal of the symposium was to foster a community of scholarship on global Anabaptist-Mennonite themes. “We

nurture a new generation of Anabaptist-Mennonite scholarship that serves the church in its global expression.”

Participants and responders expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to exchange research and receive feedback. Several forums will help scholars to continue sharing their work, as well as bring attention to future academic opportunities for presenting and sharing their scholarly research.

Project Updates

biblioteca
DIGITAL ANABAPTISTA

¡Explorar los
recursos de la
Biblioteca
Digital
Anabautista!

Yennamalla
Jayaker
preaching



Biblioteca Digital Anabautista

The digitization of materials for the [Biblioteca Digital Anabautista](#) (BiDA) continues. The ISGA, Mennonite Historical Library, and AMBS have been collaborating on the development of a digital library of Anabaptist-Mennonite theological resources in Spanish. Hosted by ISGA's Global Anabaptist Wiki (www.anabaptistwiki.org) and supported by [Mennonite Mis-](#)

[sion Network](#), this collection is especially intended to serve on-line courses offered by Latin American seminaries. The materials are also fully accessible to anyone looking for relevant theological resources in Spanish.

Many of the published writings by John Driver are now available as well as resources by other scholars such as

Carolyn Holderread Heggen, Daniel Schipani, and Dennis Byler. Works can be viewed thematically or by author.

John Driver, [La Paz y la Misión de la Iglesia](#)

Dennis Byler, [Hablar sobre Dios desde la Biblia](#)

Carolyn Holderread Heggen, [Abuso Sexual en los Hogares Cristianos y la Iglesia](#)

Daniel Schipani, [Discipulado y Liberación](#)

J. Nelson Kraybill, [Apocalipsis y Lealtad](#)

John Driver, [Dios y César: Paz y Militarismo](#)

Luis Berkhof, [Teología Sistemática](#)

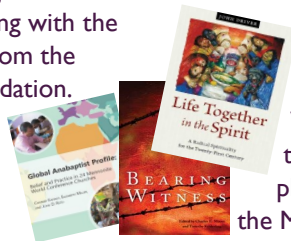
Rhoda Shenk Keener and Carolyn Holderread Heggen, [Cuidándonos Entre Mujeres: Preparándonos para un ministerio de compasión](#)

Translation Projects

Work is moving forward on a translation project that the ISGA is overseeing with the help of a grant from the Schowalter Foundation. Three MWC-related texts—[The MWC Global Anabaptist Profile](#); John Driver, [Life Together in the Spirit](#); and [Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyr-](#)

[dom and Costly Discipleship](#)—are currently being translated into Spanish, French, Hindi, and Indonesian.

We hope to have this project completed in time for the MWC General Council meetings, which will take place in Nairobi, Kenya in April, 2018.



Visiting Scholar: Yennamalla Jayaker

In early July the ISGA hosted Yennamalla Jayaker, a visiting scholar from the Telangana region of India, as he conducted research at the Mennonite Historical Library of Goshen College on the

Mennonite Brethren Church in India. Jayaker serves as a lecturer at the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad and as a pastor of a local MB congregation. He is also the editor of *Suvarthamani*, a journal published on behalf of the MB church, and is currently in a doctoral program at

Serampore College focused on the Dalit Christian contribution to socio-cultural, political, and economic transformation in the Telangana Region. We were pleased to support Jayaker's work, and extend our thanks to John and Dorothy Yoder Nyce for providing hospitality during his time in Goshen.

GAMEO Finds a New Home



GLOBAL
ANABAPTIST
MENNONITE
ENCYCLOPEDIA ONLINE

The [Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online](#) (GAMEO) has found a new home with the ISGA.

On May 19, 2017, members of the GAMEO management board voted unanimously to transfer oversight of the project to ISGA. John D. Roth will serve in a new position as the project's general editor.

The vision behind GAMEO emerged in the late 1980s at the initiative of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, as an effort to preserve database information gathered for its three-volume Mennonites in Canada series. In 1998 the vision expanded to transfer the content of the five-volume Mennonite Encyclopedia into a digital format that would be accessible to internet users around the world. That project resulted in an online encyclopedia of over 12,000 articles. In the years since then, volunteer editors of GAMEO, along with regional committees around North America, have updated information on thousands of articles and added more than 4,000 new entries.

Public interest in the site has steadily expanded. In the month of April 2017, nearly 50,000 researchers visited the site seeking information on topics related to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Today, GAMEO is routinely cited by news organizations, scholars, genealogists and a host of other users.

“It is fitting that we could bring the long tradition of ‘scholarship for the church’ to support now the global vision of GAMEO in the digital age.”

“As GAMEO has matured,” said Richard Thiessen, former GAMEO director, “we have increasingly felt as if it needed an institutional home. The ISGA, with its strong academic foundation and global perspective, is a perfect fit for the next chapter of GAMEO’s development.”

Roth agreed. “The origins of GAMEO go back to the creation of the Mennonite Encyclopedia in the 1940s and 1950s at Goshen College,” Roth said. “As the scope of Anabaptist-Mennonite research here has broadened to include the global church, it is fitting that we could bring the long tradition of ‘scholarship for the church’ to support now the global vision of GAMEO in the digital age.”

Sam Steiner, one of the founders of GAMEO and an on-going associate editor, said “this new institutional home,

together with additional associate editors, will expand GAMEO on the good foundations shaped by Richard Thiessen over the past six years.”

As reported by [Mennonite World Conference](#), “With the addition of GAMEO to its oversight, the ISGA will shift the focus of its Global Anabaptist Wiki to become an online archive for the global church and a repository of digital resources such as the Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible, the Bibliotheca Digital Anabautista, and materials related Anabaptist-Mennonite ecumenical involvements.”

GAMEO will continue to be owned by its six institutional partners: Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. A management board, composed of representatives from these organizations, oversees the operations of GAMEO.



Two years ago this July, the ISGA was conducting [interviews](#) for the Bearing Witness Stories Project at Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Harrisburg, PA. Rediscover these personal testimonies of costly discipleship and many more at martyrstories.org.



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ANABAPTIST MENNONITES IN CUBA

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

One Tuesday evening in April, 1994 Osvaldo Gutiérrez Parra slipped into a church service in his home town of Holguín, Cuba. Born and raised in a secular family, Osvaldo had little interest in questions of faith; his main reason for attending the revival meeting was to impress a young woman he knew would be present.

What he did not anticipate, however, was the power of the message. “I felt as if the preacher was describing me,” Osvaldo recalled. To his own surprise, at the end of the service he responded to the invitation and made a public commitment to Christ.

That decision changed Osvaldo’s life. Christianity in communist Cuba in the mid-1990s was not exactly illegal; but practicing Christians could expect to experience public shaming as well discrimination in school and at work. Ministers and outspoken believers, especially those in non-registered churches, were frequently under government surveillance. Indeed, only a few months previously, Osvaldo himself had been serving as an intelligence officer in the Cuban military where his duties included reporting on religious activity. As a young person with a promising background in the military, Osvaldo’s decision to become a Christian marked an end to his career.

Even more extraordinary was the fact that the preacher that evening, Cornelius Beachy, was a member of the Beachy Amish church. So when Osvaldo and several other young people in Holguín decided to move forward in their faith, they established house churches that adopted the theology and

practices of their Beachy Amish mentors, including beards, suspenders and distinctive dress. On December 18, 1994 they formed the *Hermandad Menonita de Holguín*, and for the next two decades they enjoyed a close relationship with the Beachy Amish church, even as they suffered ridicule and discrimination for their visible nonconformity to Cuban culture.

Two fellowships eventually emerged in Holguín—one led by Osvaldo and another by Luis Michel Silva Fernandez, a remarkably gifted young man with a voracious appetite for Anabaptist history and theology. In recent years, both house churches have parted with the Beachy Amish, albeit on different trajectories. In 2004 Osvaldo’s fellowship, the more progressive of the two, formulated a confession of faith that embraced women in leadership. In 2012, the congregation meeting in the home of Luis Michel also parted with the Beachy Amish, though they have retained a more traditional theology and practice. Still, the two groups remain in warm fellowship with each other. Indeed, Luis Michel presided over communion at the worship service I attended in Osvaldo’s home in late April.

During the past year, the journey of these two congregations has been enriched by interactions with another cluster of Anabaptist-Mennonite house fellowships in eastern Cuba known as the *Iglesia Menonita en Cuba*, who has recently affiliated with the Conservative Mennonite Church.

In the midst of all this ecclesial flux,

what binds these congregations together is a deep desire to better understand their Christian witness and Anabaptist-Mennonite identity within the Cuban context. The challenges they face are enormous. Relations with the state are complicated and uncertain, as are relations with the Brethren in Christ—an Anabaptist group that enjoys legal

recognition but whose theology is heavily tilted toward pentecostalism. Cuba remains extremely poor; and access to basic necessities is made more difficult by the social disabilities that go along with being Christians. The house fellowships

have benefitted enormously from the financial and spiritual support of North American churches; but they also recognize the complexities of dependency. And then there is the challenge of sorting through their relationships with each other, and the legacy of a tradition that has often valued purity over unity.

The gift of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church to these small fellowships is the promise that they are not alone. Moreover, the global church is living testimony to the fact that Anabaptist-Mennonites today bear witness to the Good News in many different ways.

Pray for the churches in Holguín, Mayari, and Santiago de Cuba. They are faithful Christians, loving each other sacrificially in the midst of tremendous challenges, and trying bear faithful witness to an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the gospel in a complex Cuban context.

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