

Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

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Bearing Witness website collects stories of costly discipleship

A Congolese pastor who forgave the armed men who had forced him to dig his own grave; a Ukrainian Mennonite Brethren family displaced to labor camps throughout the USSR and finally reunited in Kazakhstan; a missionary who accompanied Christian communities in China during World War II, even though she had to be in hiding much of the time.

These stories are part of the Bearing Witness Stories Project, an online collection of testimonies of Anabaptist believers who have lived out their faith despite significant opposition and suffering.

The Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and Goshen

College launched the project's website (www.martyrstories.org) in March.

inspiring and relevant, it does not include the testimonies of the Anabaptists who have also



The Bearing Witness Stories Project launched its website in March.

For centuries, *Martyrs Mirror*, Thielemann van Braght's 1685 collection of martyr stories, has been the main source for Anabaptist stories of costly discipleship.

While *Martyrs Mirror* remains

suffered for their faith in the years since 1685.

Building on the spiritual legacy of *Martyrs Mirror*, the Bearing Witness Stories Project's new website will gather and circulate these stories of (cont. on pg. 3)

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MCUSA Survey Reveals Global Connections

Member churches of Mennonite Church USA count varied and numerous connections with global Anabaptist churches, but until recently there has been no way to measure the degree and form

of these relationships.

The results from a survey sent out to all MCUSA congregations by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism provides helpful insight into the denomination's connections to the global church.

The impetus for the survey

emerged as a direct result of ISGA Director John D. Roth's experiences in both domestic and global church settings.

"I have visited many MCUSA congregations and in those travels I have always been impressed by the wide range of international connections in (cont. on pg. 5)

ISGA Initiates Letter-Writing Campaign for Korean CO

On April 30th, Korean Mennonite Sang-Min Lee was convicted and sentenced to an 18-month prison term for refusing to fulfill his obligatory military service.

Over ninety-two percent of the world's imprisoned conscientious objectors are South Koreans, but Sang-Min is the first Mennonite to take this stance.

The Grace and Peace Mennonite Church in Seoul has supported Sang-Min throughout the process and is committed to accompanying him through these next 18 months.

Anabaptists from around the world have also sent many letters of encouragement to Sang-Min in the weeks surrounding his trial.

Recognizing that the frequency of these letters will fade over time, the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism has initiated a letter-writing campaign to ensure that Sang-Min feels the solidarity and care of those who share his convictions and beliefs as strongly in month thirteen as he did during his trial.

Soon after he became a Christian, Sang-Min was moved by Jesus' teaching to love our enemies,

especially his rebuke to Peter for defending him with a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As he learned more about the Christian faith, Lee's commitment to the gospel of peace deepened, putting him on a collision course with the Korean government.

focused on cases in Korea and Colombia.

On May 12, the ISGA launched the letter-writing campaign, with the hope of securing the promise of a letter for each month of Sang-Min's imprisonment.

*Support Korean Mennonite CO
Sang-Min Lee during his prison term.
Sign up to write him a letter!*



On the basis of his criminal record, Lee recognizes that he will have "a bad reputation in society" and will likely be barred from many career paths for the rest of his life.

Yet he remains confident in his convictions. "I want the next generation to live in a better place with respect to individual choices and decisions," he said.

The letter-writing campaign was born out of communication between ISGA Director John D. Roth and Jenny Neme, the director of the Colombian Mennonite peace and human rights organization, Justapaz.

Concern for Sang-Min became a natural part of their collaboration to plan workshops on conscientious objection for Mennonite World Assembly next year,

Justapaz has been aggressive in promoting the campaign in Latin America; so far twenty individuals and congregations from North America, Latin America, and Europe have committed to write forty-eight letters to Sang-Min.

As the campaign grows, the ISGA hopes that more global regions will become involved, so that Sang-Min and the Grace and Peace Mennonite Church will be able to hold tangible signs of the solidarity and shared faith within the global Anabaptist fellowship.

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Join the letter-writing campaign for Sang-Min at:
www.martyrstories.org/co-letter-campaign

Did you know? The ISGA has a new website !

<http://www.goshen.edu/isga>

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In addition to the most up-to-date information, you'll find archives of all ISGA press and links to full PDFs of the Texts in Translation series.

Bearing Witness, cont. from pg. 1

costly discipleship within the Anabaptist global communion, with the goal of encouraging faithfulness to the way of Jesus and strengthening relationships within the global Anabaptist church.

The website invites users to read the stories, while also providing opportunities for deeper and broader engagement.

Stories can easily be shared via a variety of social media platforms, and a comment forum follows each story, allowing for further conversation.

ISGA director John D. Roth hopes that the

“One of the main purposes of the site is to elicit further storytelling from global Anabaptist communities.”

website will inspire people who are already deeply committed to a Christian ethic of peace as well as those who have

been disappointed by more institutional forms of Christianity.

Roth also anticipates that the website will be helpful to churches.

“I hope that the site could become a useful resource for teachers at church-related schools, Sunday School teachers, pastors looking for sermon illustrations, perhaps individuals looking for weekly devotional material,” he said.

The website also hosts a blog that explores issues of spirituality, gender, interreligious and ecumenical relationships, political advocacy and other

themes that relate to the website’s growing story collection.

One of the main purposes of the site is to elicit further storytelling from global Anabaptist communities, especially from those who may not yet have had the chance to share their stories beyond a local or regional level.

“One Guatemalan church leader noted that the generation of Christians who lived through the Contra Wars of the 1980s is now aging,” said Roth.

“His hope was that the project could provide a framework for his church to gather the stories of ordinary people who suffered deeply during those years.”

Images of the Global Anabaptist Profile



The Tumbagara congregation (Bihar Mennonite Mandli) in India.



Members of the Brethren in Christ in Zimbabwe traveling to a GAP meeting.



Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu (BIC) members in Malawi fill out surveys.



Members of Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites in Congo filling out surveys.



Research Associate Alfonso Cabaña explaining the survey to the Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet in Paraguay.



We are grateful for the Research Associates, church leaders and congregational members who are participating in the Global Anabaptist Profile and look forward eagerly to its completion next summer as part of the 16th MWC Assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Thank you for your support of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism in its collaboration with Mennonite World Conference in this pioneering study.

MCUSA Survey, cont. from pg. 1



the lives of these local congregations. Yet I don't think we have a very good sense yet of what form that is taking," said Roth.

Survey results reveal a high level of global connectedness among responding MCUSA congregations.

Nearly all of the 307 respondents reported at least some connection to global Anabaptist congregations or institutions, everything from sister church relationships to financial support.

While the vast majority of congregations support Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Central Committee in their global partnerships, many congregations also have additional connections.

Some have helped to host and start immigrant congregations in their city.

Others support domestic programs that work with immigrants in their local communities.

Many churches fund learning tours and delegations to visit congregations and conferences outside of the U.S., and a number of pastors have used their sabbaticals to build connections with global churches.

Congregations with a high percentage of members born outside of the U.S. constitute a particularly vibrant locus of connection with the global church, and these churches tend to be directly involved in both international and domestic church life and ministry.

For the majority of responding congregations, however, these global connections do not appear to translate into a clear partnership with Mennonite World Conference, the international fellowship of Anabaptist-related churches.

"Whereas we have a high level of international connections in our congregations," said Roth, "we don't necessarily have a very strong sense of connection to Mennonite

World Conference, which is the strongest framework that we have for expressing our connectedness as a global body."

Although a majority of congregations report an affinity with international Anabaptist groups, there was little consensus on how MWC is part of the picture.

A majority of churches, furthermore, report weak connections to MWC programs and members.

This information could be very useful to MWC and MCUSA as they seek to build a stronger relationship.

After a more thorough analysis, the ISGA will share the survey results with MCUSA, MWC, and those congregations that participated in the survey.

"My hope is that the results of the survey can assist Mennonites in North America in coming to a deeper awareness and appreciation of the global nature of our fellowship," said Roth.



Do you have a story of costly discipleship to share?

Submit it via the [Share a Story](#) form on the Bearing Witness website!

Editorial :

Faith through the lens of social science by John D. Roth

Recently, as member of the Mennonite World Conference support staff, I was asked to participate in a formal evaluation of my intercultural sensitivity. As I took the survey I felt my frustration growing.

Each of the questions posed by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) had a limited number of responses. And very often, it seemed, none of the options adequately expressed how I would like to respond.

By the time I finished the questionnaire, I could think of a dozen reasons why the IDI was an inadequate measure of intercultural competence, especially in a Christian context.

Yet, to my surprise, when we gathered with the MWC Executive Committee to review the results, our conversation was genuinely constructive, generating new insights into how we might work together in a more effective way.

For all of its limitations, participating in the IDI provided a very helpful frame of reference for deeper understandings of our cultural similarities and differences.

Participants in the Global Anabaptist Profile—one of the first systematic efforts to gather information on the faith, life, and practices of MWC member groups—are likely to experience something similar.

During the past year, Research Associates from 24 MWC churches have been carrying out a survey that we hope will provide a clearer picture of our global fellowship.

Some of the questions asked in the survey—e.g., age at baptism; level of education; mode of baptism, etc.—are fairly straightforward. But many questions call for more nuanced responses.

Framing those responses appropriately is made even more complicated by the fact that the GAP is being carried out in 26 languages in vastly different cultural contexts.

Using the “MWC Shared Convictions” as a frame of reference, Conrad Kanagy (Prof. of Sociology at Elizabethtown College) and I spent several long days together with the Research Associates trying to

collaborate on wording that the majority of people could recognize as useful in their contexts.

Yet on any given question or topic, it is almost certain that some individuals or groups will not like any of the options offered. Some will want to challenge the “objectivity” of the survey, or will worry that the process is going to judge them on the “correctness” of their answers.

“Our deepest understandings about faith can never be reduced to a series of boxes that needs to be checked.”

After all, our deepest understandings about faith can never be reduced to series of boxes that needed to be checked.

Conrad and I recognize the limitations of social science “instruments.” The GAP will not provide an absolutely objective measure of faith and practices of the groups that make up our global community. All of us will need to interpret the results with appropriate caution and humility.

Yet, as with the IDI, I firmly believe that participating in this project will deepen our identity as individual church groups and as an MWC global family.

Discussion of the results (including critiques of how questions were worded) will bring us into significant theological conversations and alert us to tendencies that we may have sensed but had not yet named.

The open-ended questions and interviews will provide additional insight for interpreting the quantitative data. The process should help us identify and celebrate areas of strength in our global body; and the results may assist leaders in setting priorities for their local churches.

In the end, Christian faith is expressed most fully in the testimonies of transformed lives and the witness of local communities where hurting people experience healing and hope.

But healthy churches—especially at the national and global level—also need to be attentive to the bigger picture. And surveys like the Global Anabaptist Profile can provide a window into who we are together and where we seem to be heading.

John D. Roth is the director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and professor of history at Goshen College.