

Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

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ISGA Hosts History Writing Webinars

In March and April, the [Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism](#) (ISGA) hosted the workshop "Writing the Stories of our Faith Communities," facilitated by Mexican sociologist and historian Carlos Martínez García. Targeted to Latin American Anabaptists who wanted to learn how to write the stories of their own faith communities or



of important people and leaders, the four workshop sessions were attended by more than ten people from different countries.

The participants were able to learn from the vast experience of Carlos Martínez García as a writer and historian. Martínez not only shared

his knowledge and experience but also motivated the participants to begin identifying the topic, field, and plan of their research proposal. One of the research proposals focused on the history of Anabaptist groups in Ecuador and their relationship with indigenous communities; another fo-

(Continued on page 2)

Elizabeth Miller Starts as ISGA Director

After a significant leadership transition for the ISGA last spring following [John D. Roth's retirement announcement](#) and [Goshen College's extensive candidate search](#), the ISGA was thrilled to [announce a new director](#). In May 2022, Elizabeth Miller accepted the offer to join the Goshen College history department and to serve as



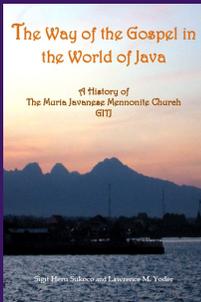
Elizabeth Miller

the next director of the ISGA and the [Mennonite Historical Library](#). [Miller officially began her work in August 2022](#).

"Anabaptist faith and practice has looked different across time and place. To be able to bring those distinct expressions in conversation with each other through the work of the ISGA at Goshen College is both a joy and a privilege," Elizabeth wrote regarding her new position as director of the ISGA.

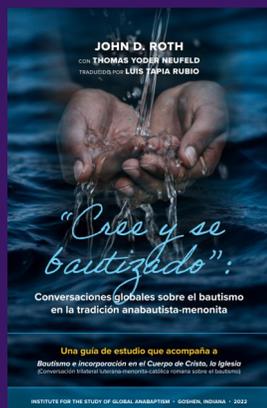
Academically, Miller received a BA in history from [Goshen College](#) and an MA in theological studies from [Anabaptist Mennonite](#)

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[www.goshen.edu/
isga/purchase/](http://www.goshen.edu/isga/purchase/)



The Spanish
translation of the
Baptism Study Guide
is also now available!

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isga/publications/](http://www.goshen.edu/isga/publications/)

LA History Writing Webinars, cont.

(Continued from page 1)

cused on the actions of Mennonite churches during the armed conflict.

The ISGA aims to continue to support this work of compiling the history of Anabaptist communities in Latin America and will remain in conversation with workshop participants.

ISGA Research Fellow Luis Tapia Rubio, who coordinated the workshop, will continue to facilitate story collection.

You can find the [video recordings of the four workshop sessions](#) in the [Center for Anabaptist Electronic Resources - CREA](#) collection on the Global Anabaptist Wiki platform

(www.anabaptistwiki.org). If you are interested in collecting the history of your own faith community, an important event or event that has taken place in it, or the story of someone who has impacted their church and community, please contact us at: isga@goshen.edu.

Miller as New ISGA Director, cont.

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[Biblical Seminary](#). Miller previously worked as a public historian with Anabaptist churches in Colombia; her book based on that research was just published (*Desde el Principio Anabautistas: La Historia de las Iglesias Menonitas y Hermanos Menonitas en Colombia, 1946-1975* (MCC / Editorial Gente Nueva, 2022)). It is [available online in BiDA](#) (bida-es.org), under her name as author. She also served as the ISGA administrator from 2013-2017 and as [co-program director of the Mennonite Central Committee Colombia-Ecuador](#) program from 2017-2022.

Roth writes, "I am extremely pleased that Elizabeth has agreed to carry forward the work of the ISGA. She brings a depth of international experience, demonstrated administrative gifts, academic gifts,

and a love for the church to the task. The future of the ISGA is in very good hands!"

The ISGA is also grateful to Goshen College for its decision to bring the ISGA into the college budget. The ISGA will continue

to count on your support for the ongoing work of the ISGA and MHL, but this decision by college administrators means that Miller's energies will focus primarily on program development.

BiNA Launches

In May 2022
the [Bibliothèque
numérique anabaptiste \(BiNA\)](#)

 **bibliothèque**
NUMÉRIQUE ANABAPTISTE

website was created to share free French-language Anabaptist-Mennonite theological and historical resources online. This digital library, following the model of the successful Spanish-language [Biblioteca Digital Anabautista \(BiDA\)](#), will serve French distance-learning courses and other users by making these resources freely accessible. The project affirms the importance of having quality theological resources from Anabaptist perspectives available to the global church, regardless of their geographic location. Look for the Bibliothèque icon and BiNA link on the Global Anabaptist Wiki homepage: www.anabaptistwiki.org. We are grateful to the Schowalter Foundation for their support in helping to make this project possible.

ISGA Publishes Baptism Study Guide

Historically, Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists have strongly disagreed about the meaning and method of baptism, even to the point of violence. Could these diverse Christian groups find common ground today or at the least, find ways to articulate and respect their differences? The Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversation on Baptism worked at exactly these questions. From 2012 to 2017, representatives from each of these three traditions met for dialogue, articulating the results of their conversations in the document “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” (available in multiple languages online: <https://mwc-cmm.org/resources/baptism-and-incorporation-body-christ-church>). Now the ISGA has published a study guide to accompany churches in studying the fruits of the Trilateral Dialogues and related pastoral questions. This important resource is available to churches in North America.

Following the publication of the results emerging from the Trilateral Dialogues in 2020, church leaders identified a need to make this work accessible to Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations and lay leaders, as well as to foster ecumenical conversations about baptism at all levels of church participation. Upon [receiving a generous Teacher-Scholar Grant](#) from the [Calvin Institute of Christian Worship](#), previous ISGA Director John D. Roth began to facilitate seminars among various groups of Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders.

A first seminar was an online global gathering that functioned as the annual Mennonite World Conference event “Renewal 2021.” This presentation, titled [“Believe and Be Baptized: A Global Conversation about Baptism,”](#) featured [two webinars by John D. Roth and Tom Yoder Neufeld](#), each containing a presentation and time for questions and conversation. Around 200 people from 30 countries participated in these webinars. They are now available to watch online (<https://mwc-cmm.org/resources/renewal-2021-webinars>).

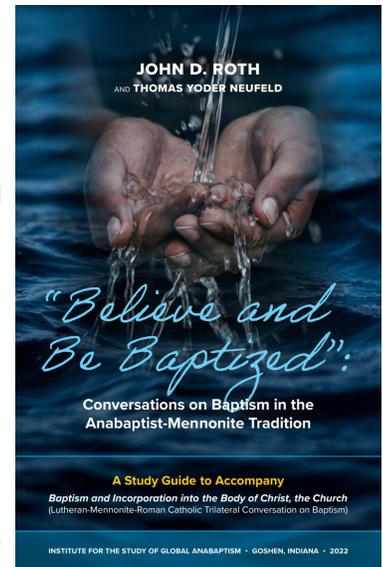
Over the last year, Roth facilitated four in-person seminars with Mennonite conferences in the United States. The seminars focused on the Anabaptist history of baptism and current ecumenical conversations. Following Roth’s presentation in the seminars, a local Catholic and Lutheran priest, pastor, or theologian was invited to respond. These workshops also featured open dialogue and questions throughout the day. Participants received a copy of the [January](#)

[2021 special issue of the Mennonite Quarterly Review](#) which contains the whole “Baptism and Incorporation...” document, along with written responses.

Based on these collaborations and using additional material prepared by Yoder Neufeld, Roth created the newly published study guide to accompany the “Baptism and Incorporation...” document. The “Believe and Be Baptized”: Conversations on Baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition” booklet offers accessible descriptions of the histories of baptism, along with explanations of the significance of baptism in different traditions. Each of the eight short chapters includes a helpful summary of material, historical and contextual information, questions for reflection and testing, and a prayer. Congregations will find this publication to be a valuable resource and opportunity for theological reflection and ecumenical dialogue. The study guide is also available in Spanish for use by Spanish-speaking congregations, thanks to ISGA Research Associate Luis Tapia Rubio’s translation.

The booklet was intended to be used as a series in Sunday school classes or small groups, but could also be adapted for use in other church settings. Roth writes, “Although groups in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have sometimes had a reputation for being suspicious about liturgy and rituals – we are, in fact, deeply shaped by our worship practices [especially essential practices like baptism]... I also hope that the booklet can help modern Mennonites – many of whom have grown squeamish about the language of ‘conversion’ and ‘moments of decision’ – find ways to incorporate invitations to faith (and baptism) more naturally into the worship life of the congregation.”

Both English and Spanish translations are available in printed and PDF form. Thanks to the grant from the Calvin Institute, free printed copies of the study guide will be made available to MCUSA conferences and church partners for distribution to congregations. It will also be available to order on the ISGA website for congregational study. Both the English and Spanish version will be available in PDF form online for free download. Order and download information is available at the following link: <https://www.goshen.edu/isga/publications/>. The ISGA is excited to offer this resource to enliven the theological, liturgical, and ecumenical discourse in churches across North America.



CLAIMING THE PROMISE OF LIFE ABUNDANT

By Elizabeth Miller, director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

Growing up as a child in a North American Mennonite congregation, the biblical texts about peacebuilding that I most often heard were from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. When I first moved to Colombia, South America, in 2009 to re-search the history of the Anabaptist denominations there, I also heard many sermons focused on the Sermon on the Mount. Yet I found that John 10:10 was referenced much more frequently than in the North American Mennonite churches I had known.

In John 10 Jesus is in the midst of a discourse about the Good Shepherd and his sheep. Contrasting himself with the thief that comes to kill and destroy, Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Some scholars suggest that the writer of John intended life in its fullness to be understood eschatologically, but Colombian Anabaptists have insisted that Jesus’ promise is for the present as well.

Colombian Mennonite Ricardo Esquivia was one of the first to publicly explore the “abundant life” promised in John 10:10 and apply it to the Colombian context. In 1998 he wrote a reflection on peacebuilding informed by John 10:10: “For many, peace is the absence of war. They have not yet embraced the concept of peace as the fruit of justice, as reconciliation, understanding reconciliation as the reconstruction of lives, of trust, love, respect, and mutual care.”

The year in which Esquivia wrote those words was the same year the Colombian air force bombed the hamlet of Santo Domingo, killing 17 Colombian citizens, including 6 children. It was two years before kidnappings in the country reached a peak of over 3,500 annually and ten years before confirmations of the extrajudicial killings known as “falsos positivos” began to break national news. To speak of life abundant

in a context where the absence of war would have been a welcome reality required a deeply rooted and imaginative spirituality, coupled with an unflinching awareness of the forces that seek to kill and destroy.

I soon found this testimony of “life abundant” evident in the personal lives of church members, as well as in corporate actions. When faced with the death of family members, the bereaved praised the God of Life. Every September on the International Day of Peace, Colombian Mennonites took to the streets of their cities to hand out bread and tracts with commitments for nonviolence. It was explained to me that hunger and peace were incompatible—the abundant life as promised by Jesus included a full belly—so bread must be part of the public witness. A common grace before meals thanked God for provision and alleviation of our physical hunger; it ended by asking God to give those around the table a hunger for justice.

For Colombian Anabaptists life in abundance as promised by Jesus is at the very heart of the gospel. As Mennonite Brethren leader Américo Murillo stated, “[Jesus] gave health and food as part of the goal of his mission, of salvation. That salvation includes health, food, and all that [we need].” Such a holistic understanding of the gospel, in turn, constitutes a crucial framework for Christian community and the call to peace-making and reconciliation.

The formative nature of the inner congregational life of the church is coupled with a steadfast commitment to envisioning abundant life for neighbors and walking in solidarity with those outside the church community. At this cross-section, a plethora of ministries have emerged: after-school programs in vul-

nerable neighborhoods, migrant ministries, mediation programs, and development initiatives in conflict zones. The gospel as “life abundant” has also proven to be resilient, al-

lowing the church to navigate humanitarian crises, prosperity gospel messaging, and post-conflict realities with agility and consistency of witness.

This is an interpretation of peacemaking in the Anabaptist tradition that I would never have known without my exposure to Colombian Anabaptists, but it has been personally transformative. I now understand and live out my faith as a follower of Jesus and practice peacebuilding differently, because of those encounters. The promise of “life abundant” from John 10:10 is rooted deep down in me, alongside the Sermon on the Mount.

These experiences have clarified for me the necessity of collaborative, equitable and mutually enriching global Anabaptist scholarship. Under John D. Roth’s wise leadership, the ISGA focused its resources and connections to further such goals. I look forward to carrying on those commitments. That more would have the chance to engage with the insights born out of Anabaptist faith as lived and practiced in diverse contexts!

“For Colombian Anabaptists life in abundance ... is at the very heart of the gospel.”

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