

## Student researchers make strides with interview database

Goshen College students have been key researchers at the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism this year, helping to catalog and index the hundreds of oral history interviews in the Jaime Prieto Interview Collection. Recorded in the 1990s and early 2000s by Costa Rican historian Jaime Prieto, the interviews detail the memories and reflections of Anabaptists from across Latin America. History major Montce Martinez began working with the collection in the summer of 2023, as part of Goshen College's Maple Scholars Program. Martinez's efforts led to the creation of a basic database and initial cataloging of the digitized recordings. This database will be a crucial tool for researchers, with basic information on the interviewees; brief summaries of interview contents, subjects and themes; and the geographic scope of the interview.

Martinez's work in the summer revealed the sheer scope of the collection. In addition to 252 interviews, the collection includes sixteen additional recordings of worship services and sermons. The interviews represent significant geographic diversity, originating from at least 15 countries and regions: Honduras, Peru, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

In recent months, efforts to catalog the collection have been continued by Ruam Barbosa, a senior history major from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As a Portuguese-language speaker, Barbosa has focused on interviews coming from Brazil, especially from the south of the country,



As part of his senior internship, Goshen College history major **Ruam Barbosa** has been cataloging and indexing the Portuguese-language interviews in the collection.

where German-speaking Mennonites established colonies beginning in the 1930s. His work on the collection fulfills the internship requirement for the history degree at Goshen College.

Although Barbosa does not come from a Mennonite background, some of the people and events in these interviews are not so far removed from his early religious experience in Brazil. His family was Catholic on one side and Pentecostal on the other. One of the most interesting themes he has encountered is that of Mennonites engaging Pentecostal culture. "The Pentecostals that some of the interviewees talk about—their leaders are the same as the church

that my mom and grandma go to. I participated in those churches from ten to fifteen years old," said Barbosa.

Barbosa reports that working with the interviews has been a good way to learn about how a historian like Prieto, whose work Barbosa has read for various projects during his history studies, conducts oral history interviews. Barbosa has found himself particularly interested in the interaction between Mennonites and Pentecostals in the early 21st century, as Pentecostalism continued to spread. In the interviews, Barbosa

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encountered stories of intermarriage between Mennonites and Pentecostals and reflections from interviewees on the challenges of navigating between the two types of faith communities. He hopes to continue his studies in graduate school, with the possibility of further research on Mennonites in Brazil and continued engagement with the Brazilian interviews in the Prieto collection.

As the ISGA continues its efforts to fully catalog the Jaime Prieto Interview Collection, these recordings will be vital primary sources for researchers of Latin American Anabaptism, as well as for Goshen College students studying oral history and different forms of historical writing. New publications have already begun to emerge from use of the collection. Martinez recently published a short biography of Gildardo Cardona Tabares in the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)*, based partially on Prieto's 1999 interview with Cardona. Cardona was an early leader in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Colombia. The ISGA hopes



Goshen College history major **Montce Martinez** did the initial intake for all of the interviews in the collection and wrote a biography based on one of the interviews, as part of her Maple Scholars work.

that many others will make similar use of this resource as they seek to study and share stories of Anabaptist communities in Latin America. ✨

## New Uploads to BiDA

The Biblioteca Digital Anabautista continues to be active, making Spanish-language material available online for seminary courses in various parts of the world. Recent new titles in the BiDA ([biblioana.org](http://biblioana.org)) include:

- ***La Confianza Sagrada: Límites saludables para el liderazgo en las iglesias***, by Alix Lozano and Elizabeth Soto.
- ***La Irrupción del Shalom: En el pueblo de Dios se ha iniciado la renovación del mundo***, by John H. Yoder, Douglas Gwyn, Eugene F. Roop, and George Hunsinger.
- ***Una Herencia del Anabautismo en México: Entre menonitas étnicas y conversos***, edited by Sandra Márquez Olvera, Carlos Martínez-García, Víctor M. Pedroza Cruz, and Ruhama A. Pedroza García.
- All existing issues of **RELEA (Red Latinoamericana de Estudios Anabautistas)**.

## From the Director

BY **ELIZABETH MILLER**, ISGA DIRECTOR

Theologians and missiologists have sometimes used the image of a mosaic to illustrate how different cultural expressions and faith traditions can contribute to a more complex and varied understanding of who we are as church communities and what the Holy Spirit is doing among us collectively.

Yet mosaics are not simply composite images. Although the individual pieces are located next to each other in a larger arrangement, they do not fit together perfectly; mosaics are inherently fragmented. "These things, while they might stand beside one another, could never be combined," writes Sofia Samatar in her memoir, *The White Mosque*. "There was really no way to put them together, except as a mosaic: that

is, as a shattering." What if, as Samatar suggests, the cracks are a crucial part of our relatedness?

Sometimes these cracks trace painful histories; other times they may mark unique expressions of faith in individual contexts. Either way they are vital to the composition of the larger mosaic. Indeed, the kind of constructive and contextualized methodology proposed by ISGA Research Fellow Danang Kristiawan in this issue of *Rhizome* is simply not possible without attention to the cracks. Kristiawan holds the tension of a desire for togetherness within the global Mennonite family, on the one hand, and the need to uphold the struggles and experience of Indonesian Mennonites on the other. This is not an easy tension to carry, but as Samatar so poetically concludes, "This is the source of light." May that light be a guide to us all. ✨

# Constructing Mennonite theology in Indonesia

BY **DANANG KRISTIAWAN**

*Danang Kristiawan began as a Research Fellow with the ISGA in 2021 and is passionate about contextual theological education from an Indonesian Mennonite perspective. He currently pastors a GITJ church in Jepara and teaches Anabaptist history and theology at the Mennonite seminary in Pati.*

Writing our own theology is an important and necessary task for the Mennonite community in Indonesia. First, very little literature on Mennonite theology is written in Indonesian, and most congregations in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, do not speak English. Second, those books on Mennonite theology that do exist in Indonesian are all translated. So while they provide an overview of Mennonite theology, it is not a theology that was born in Indonesia and produced by Indonesians. Given these factors, I believe we urgently need to write an Indonesian Mennonite theology that can be used by lay people and congregations.

But, in practice, it is not easy to start the process. How do we define Mennonite theology? What makes a theology Mennonite? Based on what criteria? Can the theological understanding of a community that identifies as Mennonite, necessarily always be called Mennonite theology? In other words, is Mennonite theology determined by affiliation or is it determined by certain values that could be called Mennonite? Here we struggle with the tension between universality and particularity, between unity and uniquely local identities, between the global and the local.

Recently, contextual theology and decolonial approaches have brought renewed awareness to the local context. These approaches critique the assumption of universality in theology as a form of cultural hegemony; they also affirm local perspectives on culture and theology as originating from contextual struggles. This is certainly a very valuable perspective, where local experiences and context

are given an equal voice in theological conversation. In this case, to write Indonesian Mennonite theology means we can write about the theology that is lived and understood by the Mennonite community in Indonesia.

Without attention to the existence of shared values in theological perspective, however, we can fall into a romanticism of particularity. Such romanticism may make us less critical of the blind spots that exist in each local culture. In addition, local identities are never separate from global influences; in the local context there are many experiences that intertwine to form identity. One example is the Javanese Mennonite community in Indonesia. Mennonites came to Java through the Dutch Mennonite Mission that arrived in 1851 and succeeded in preaching the Gospel to the Javanese people. At the same time, a local evangelist and Javanese mystic named Tunggul Wulung was teaching a Gospel that the Javanese could understand. He did not identify as a Mennonite, but later his community came under the care of a Mennonite mission.

After the Mennonite church became more mature and independent in the 1950s, local leaders studied at theological schools in the Calvinist tradition. Much of the theological literature of that time was also written and translated from Reformed theology. As a result, the influence of Calvinism has been evident in the theology, liturgy, and organization of the Javanese Mennonite community from that time until now. In the 1990s and 2000s, Pentecostal and charismatic theology developed rapidly alongside dispensational-style evangelical theology. Therefore, when the Javanese Mennonite church tried to create a doctrinal conviction as the “theological standard” of the conference in 2005, its content was strongly influenced by dispensationalism. All of these historical influences are present in the local theology that emerges in the Javanese Mennonite Church today. We can see that the local Mennonite community contains various kinds of traditions—what I could call “texts”—that form the identity of the local community.



Here I imagine that building a local Mennonite theology requires embracing the tension between particularity and universality, local identity and collective solidarity. It's all part of a multi-textual dialogue. Building Mennonite theology in Java requires dialoguing with various interrelated texts. The first is the Gospel text as a source of inspiration. Second are local texts or experiences of community (context). In this case, Mennonite theology in Java needs to engage interreligious spiritual traditions as the context of experience. Third is the historical text of the community's faith, including all of its shifts and struggles. Many theological traditions influence and shape the identity of a community over time; we cannot obsess over purity, because nothing is truly pure. Fourth is the text of global Mennonite tradition. Building a local Mennonite theology does not mean ignoring the long history of the Mennonite tradition, even if it comes from a different context. The Mennonite tradition can be a valuable perspective to engage in multi-textual dialogue. This dialogue needs to be carried out appreciatively, critically and with an openness to transformation.

This multi-textual dialogue process for the Javanese Mennonite community will produce an authentic theological construction, where the community's unique history, context and experiences are considered alongside the broader Mennonite faith tradition. In this way we can fully appreciate the particularity of Javanese Mennonite faith, while also contributing to the togetherness of the global Mennonite family. 🌿

# Biography: Samuel M. Mlotshwa

*Goshen College student McKenzie Richardson adapted this biography written by Barbara Nkala and Doris Dube, in Growing and Branching Out: Brethren In Christ Church in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa (2014). Published online in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), it has been adapted and reprinted here with permission.*

Samuel M. Mlotshwa: music teacher and singer in Ibandla Labazalwane Kukristu e-Zimbabwe (BICC Zimbabwe); born in 1914 in Mayezane to Masigwa and Lomapholisa. He was the first born in a family of seven. In 1937 he married Matshwawu Matshazi; they had six sons and six daughters. Samuel died of natural causes 8 April 2012 at 98 years old.

Samuel Mlotshwa gave his life to the Lord at a very young age, as his parents were well-respected worshippers. His father was one of the first ten believers baptized into the Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe in 1899 at the recently founded Matopo Mission. Samuel was also baptized there, and throughout his life he served the Lord through his teaching, love of music, and his astounding bass voice. His awareness of the power of music



Samuel Mlotshwa with his wife, Matshwawu Matshazi.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BARBARA NKALA

allowed him to inspire others and draw them into worship.

Originally Samuel was interested in herding cattle and farming like his father, although he could be heard humming different tunes as he went about his chores. Samuel began his formal education at a primary school in Mayezane, after which he attended Matopo Mission for his upper primary education, where singing hymns motivated his love for music. Here Samuel also took a teacher training course.

Samuel went on to teach at different schools in the Insiza, Filabusi area. He also planted trees and taught songs to the students at Bungwe Primary School between 1937 and 1938. Samuel Mabhena, Mlotshwa's nephew, remembers his uncle's lasting influence. "The schools in that area were just bare, there were no trees. Mlotshwa planted a guava orchard at Bungwe. Many children were educated from the sale of guavas to communities where there were no trees... When Bungwe Secondary School was built, it was situated very near to the Primary School to be near a school with trees."

Samuel was then transferred to Bulawayo, where he taught at Lobengula Government Primary School. At Lobengula, Samuel found ways to use his position to continue to serve the Lord. For example, when the BICC needed meeting space, he asked for permission from the headmistress to use his classroom for Sunday worship services. The same classroom was also used in preparation for music competitions. Samuel became renowned as an organized and effective teacher.

Samuel and his wife Matshwawu were both blessed with beautiful voices, and they joined Makgema Motswana's choir, the Glee Singers. Their time in the Glee Singers improved Samuel's ability to teach music with the tonic solfa and staff notation. Other churches often invited him to lead worship and sing with the congregation.

The highlight of his music career came in 1960. Samuel was asked to teach and conduct the Hallelujah chorus, when evangelist Dr. Billy Graham came to



**Workineh Ayele Yami**, a teacher and pastor from Ethiopia, recently developed and taught a one-week module on the history of the Meserete Kristos Church for the 'Anabaptism in Global Context' course at Goshen College. Workineh's work with the ISGA fulfills the internship requirement for the Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies degree at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Bulawayo. Samuel was transferred to Mtshabezi Primary School (also founded by the BICC) in 1961. There he started many different choirs for teachers and students. In addition, he traveled to teach music and lead choirs at the Bible School and at Regional Conferences. Samuel primarily taught hymns of worship, African-American spirituals and South African compositions. Later Samuel was transferred to Mayezane school. While continuing teaching, he also formed an octet, whose performances were so popular that their songs were recorded and are still enjoyed today.

Samuel dedicated his life to spreading the word of God through music. He taught many people how to worship God with their voices. At the end of Samuel's life he was hard of hearing and could no longer sing well, although he still enjoyed watching others sing. His legacy lives on through his family and the students he taught. 🌿