

Rhizome

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Global Anabaptist Profile Celebrates Milestone

Sociological surveys may be uncommon evangelistic tools, but at a recent consultation celebrating the conclusion of the Global Anabaptist Profile (GAP), Damien Pelende testified that the GAP survey had indeed drawn new people into his church. The GAP, a joint initiative of the [Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism](#) (ISGA) and [Mennonite World Conference](#) (MWC), is a two-year project profiling the demographics, beliefs, and practices of 24 church conferences in MWC.

Pelende, a research associate who implemented the GAP survey in the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo, shared how the survey generated particular interest in one of the local congregations he visited. During a worship service dedicated to the GAP survey, over twenty



onlookers committed themselves to Christ; another time a Catholic visitor, after reviewing the survey, decided to become a Mennonite.

At the consultation, hosted by the [Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies](#) at Elizabethtown College (Pa.) from July 26-

30, 2015, research associates like Pelende and church leaders from 21 MWC member churches representing eighteen different countries analyzed the data collected from their respective conferences and shared stories that gave crucial context to the numbers. (Continued on pg. 2.)

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Bearing Witness Launches Storytelling Project

Naomi Tamura sat down in front of [Bearing Witness's](#) camera at [Mennonite World Conference](#) (MWC) Assembly and began telling her story.

"The struggle I have being a Japanese Mennonite Christian comes from being a minority," Tamura said. "In Japanese culture being

the norm is considered very important for most people. However I gave up being the norm to live with God."

Tamura's story was one of more than twenty stories that were shared and recorded as part of a storytelling initiative the Bearing Witness Stories Project held during MWC Assembly in July.

Although the ISGA launched the project in 2012, this was the first time Bearing Witness has invited church members to share their stories in a video format.

The stories of risk, opposition, suffering or sacrifice in the way of Christ shared in Bearing Witness's video booth were profound and moving. (Cont. pg. 4)

GAP Research Associates Reflect



"I learned some new things about my church. Some things were difficult to hear, but this is a new and deeper level of understanding."

—Francis Kamoto, Brethren in Christ Church of Malawi



"I'm happy that we do indeed have shared convictions, that the Holy Spirit is at work throughout the whole world."

—Marcos Orozco, Evangelical Mennonite Church of Nicaragua



"This has been a helpful diagnosis of the state of our churches together and has confronted us to return to an stronger identity as Anabaptists."

—César Montenegro, Evangelical Mennonite Church of Guatemala



"The results for the church of the Philippines confirms and affirms what we are doing; but they also help us understand new things to do."

—Regina Mondez, Integrated Mennonite Churches of the Philippines

Global Anabaptist Profile, cont. from pg. 1

Ground-breaking Church Profile

The consultation was the culmination of two years of data collection in the project led by John D. Roth, director of the ISGA at [Goshen College](#), and Conrad Kanagy, professor of sociology at [Elizabethtown College](#). In 2013 the same group had met at Goshen College to determine the final content of the survey, structured around the MWC "[Shared Convictions](#)," and to receive training in methods of survey implementation.

The survey was then translated into 26 different languages before research associates implemented the survey with randomly-selected congregations of their respective national conferences. Kanagy processed and formatted the data prior to the consultation, so that the group could compare their results. "I'm not aware of any other church fellowship that has done this work," Kanagy said in his closing remarks on July 29.

Funded and directed by the ISGA, the GAP is the first systematic attempt to

gather quantitative data about Anabaptist groups affiliated with MWC, whose membership has more than tripled in the past three decades.

Despite this rapid growth, however, there have been few scholarly attempts to understand these groups.

"Demographic data has been based largely on estimates," wrote Roth in a report to research associates. "And we know even less about the theological convictions, worship practices, ethical commitments, and forms of witness of many specific Anabaptist-Mennonite groups."

The data collected from the groups who have completed the survey paints a complex picture of what MWC member churches hold in common and the ways in which they differ from one another.



Research associates and church leaders from Latin America discuss the results of the Global Anabaptist Profile. Photo by Elizabeth Miller.

Consultation Contextualizes Survey Results

Individual presentations from research associates at the consultation were crucial for giving context to the survey data. "The research associates are the real experts in recognizing the authentic meaning of the results in their churches," Kanagy offered.

Consultation participants noted interesting differences in practices and assump-

tions regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit, attitudes toward tithing and political involvement, understandings of church agencies like Mennonite Central Committee, views on evangelism, and the role of women in church leadership.

In their individual presentations, research associates provided critical contextual background in their analysis of the data. Marcos Orozco of the Evangelical Mennonite Church Conference of Nicaragua (CIEMN) referenced his church's experience during the Sandinista War to explain why CIEMN's results reflected such a strong opposition to military service. "In the 1980s we had to make a strong statement on military service. We recognized that we would be killing other brothers in the church. . . . We were clear that we couldn't do this," Orozco said.

Research Associates Reflect on Challenges

The consultation also provided a forum for research associates to share some of their challenges in implementing the survey. Delbert Erb from the Argentine Mennonite Church collected data from participating churches in Argentina across a distance of 2000 km (1243 miles). In the D.R. Congo and in the Philippines, access to some of the most rural and remote congregations proved challenging, necessitating mountain travel and fording rivers. At times the travel was harrowing, but "God protected us," Pelende assured the group.

The written format of the survey also proved challenging in contexts with higher rates of illiteracy . A number of research associates found that illiteracy led to a low response rate

among women in their contexts, since they were more likely than men to be illiterate.

Even when faced with significant challenges, noted Kanagy, the research associates displayed incredible perseverance, courage, and vision in implementing the survey and in sharing their own contextual interpretations of the results from their respective conferences.

Profile Suggests Unity Despite Differences

Although the data has not yet been thoroughly analyzed, conversation at the consultation suggested that the results will be significant for congregations, national conferences, and global church bodies alike.

Many church leaders highlighted the teaching and discipleship possibilities they perceive emerging as a result of the profile. "We need more teaching on Anabaptism," concluded Lawrence Coetzee of Grace Community Church in South Africa.

Coetzee's contributed to a recurring conversation regarding identity. Many at the consultation questioned how such diverse churches could share an identity across varying contexts. Others wondered how to cultivate a strong sense of theological identity within their national conferences.

Yet the data also seemed to suggest that the churches represented by the survey do indeed share beliefs and practices in common. Regina

Mondez from the Integrated Mennonite Churches of the Philippines reflected, "I appreciate that despite different languages and cultures, the numbers communicate [a unity] across culture in ways that words could not."



Research associates and church leaders listen to a presentation summarizing the results of the Global Anabaptist Profile. Photo by Elizabeth Miller.

"I'm happy that we do indeed have shared convictions," said Marcos Orozco. "We note some differences in our cultures, but there are more things that unite us than divide us."

Roth and Kanagy are still awaiting data from two additional church conferences. When the data is complete, they will release a summary of the aggregate results as well as regional comparisons. The full data will also be made available to the MWC Executive Committee.

"The data is not an end in itself," Roth emphasized. "This project is only one step toward a richer understanding of who we are as a global fellowship and how our churches are putting the gospel into practice."

Brazilian engineer receives first Schafer-Friesen Research Fellowship

In June and July the [Mennonite Historical Library](#) (MHL) hosted Brazilian engineer and researcher Karl H. Kienitz, thanks to the [Schafer-Friesen Research Fellowship](#). The fellowship, made possible by a generous gift of \$100,000 from Abraham and Geraldine Schafer Friesen, is awarded annually to researchers interested in using the resources of the MHL.

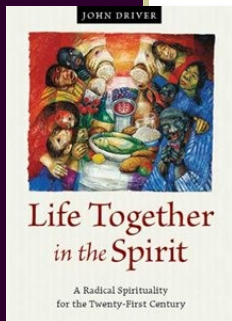
Kienitz was researching how the theology of lay Anabaptist theologian Pilgrim Marpeck affected the social and ethical aspects of his career of an engineer.

"We are delighted that Karl was the inaugural recipient of the Schafer-Friesen Award," said MHL Director John D. Roth. "His project is a great example of a creative project that might not have happened without the fellowship."

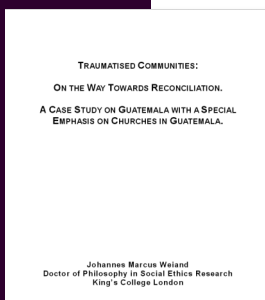


Texts in Translation

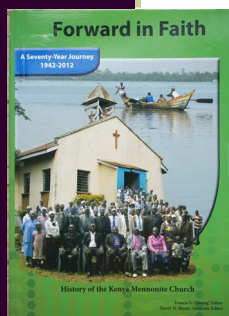
[Texts in Translation](#) is an initiative that makes creative theological and historical work from outside North America accessible to new readers. In 2015 thus far Texts in Translation has contributed to the distribution of three new texts:



Life Together in the Spirit was released this year as the seventh title in Mennonite World Conference's [Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature](#). First translated to English by the ISGA in 2011, John Driver's classic text has been updated to include study questions and responses from global Anabaptist theologians. In cooperation with MWC and Plough Publishing, the ISGA made significant contributions in the editing and translation of the final manuscript.



Originally published in English, Marcus Weiland's PhD dissertation, "[Traumatised Communities: On the Way towards Reconciliation](#)," focuses on reconciliation work and trauma healing within Guatemalan churches. Earlier this year the ISGA contracted Kevin Florentin Sprung, a Goshen College student from Paraguay, to complete a Spanish translation of Weiland's work, which will serve as a teaching resource for [SEMILLA](#), the Latin American Anabaptist seminary based in Guatemala.



Forward in Faith: A Seventy-Year Journey, 1942-2012. History of the Kenya Mennonite Church was published earlier this year by the Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC) as the culmination of collaborative process of writing, editing, and proofing involving a range of leaders within the KMC. The ISGA purchased 50 copies of *Forward in Faith* to distribute to academic journals and Anabaptist libraries and study centers in North America, hoping to increase awareness and engagement with KMC history beyond Kenya.

Bearing Witness Storytelling, cont. from pg. 1

Some, like Mary Win of Myanmar and Lucy Roca Caballero of Colombia, shared about being forced out of their home countries by violence and persecution before finding refuge and healing in churches elsewhere.

Others like Américo Aji Cabrera from Panama told stories of confronting local governments over injustices they had experienced.

Many shared stories of miracles they had witnessed, as evidence of God's hand in seemingly hopeless situations.

Nearly all those who shared a story with Bearing Witness at Assembly hoped that their stories could encourage others in their own struggles and that their stories would be received in prayer by the broader church.

Tamura closed her sharing with a message for the global church, "For you who received this message please pray for us all in Japan. And help us carry the work we do in Japan."

Over the coming year, Bearing Witness will be sharing these stories and others through its website at martyrstories.org.

Korean CO Released from Prison

On July 30 the prayers of many were answered as Sang-Min Lee, a Mennonite conscientious objector from South Korea, was released from prison three months early.

Sang-Min's service in the prison's barber shop was credited to his 18-month prison term, allowing him to leave earlier than his sentence dictated.

Sang-Min sent a letter to his congregation, the Grace and Peace Mennonite Church in Seoul, reflecting on his choice to refuse military service and his resulting imprisonment:

"I'm thinking a lot of all the people I'm thankful for. My support group's care; people that took care of me well; people who gave me news through letters; people who came the long way to see me in the midst of busy schedules; people who supported me regularly.

On top of that, the people who thought of me and prayed for me... As I live, I'm not sure how I can



Sang-Min enjoying his first hamburger after being released. Photo courtesy of Kyong-Jung Kim.

repay this huge light you've brought to me."

In the wake of Sang-Min's release, Kyong-Jung Kim, Northeast Asia Representative for Mennonite World Conference, requests continued prayer for the 660 conscientious objectors who are jailed each year in Korea and for the Korean church's peace witness.

Sang-Min's case was also an example of the possibilities of international collaboration around the issue of conscientious objection. The [Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism](#) and [Bearing Witness](#) initiated an [international letter-writing campaign](#) for Sang-Min, [Mennonite World Conference](#) sent out prayer requests to the global church during Sang-Min's trial, and [Justapaz](#) connected Sang-Min with conscientious objectors in Colombia who also face hardships for their stance against military service.

Many others shared Sang-Min's story in their churches or prayed for him in their daily prayers. Sang-Min faces a new set of challenges as he reenters civilian life, just as those who supported him are now similarly challenged to continue strengthening the bonds and connections that grew out of concern for Sang-Min during his imprisonment.

Those wishing to contact Sang-Min are invited to email him at [semz87\(at\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:semz87(at)gmail(dot)com).

"The people who thought of me and prayed for me...As I live, I'm not sure how I can repay this huge light you've brought to me."

Bearing Witness at Mennonite World Conference

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you at the Bearing Witness booth and an honor to hear your stories at MWC Assembly! From left to right: Bishop Amos Joseph and Muhagachi from Tanzania with BW staff Angeliky Santos and Elizabeth Miller. The Bearing Witness Booth. Richard Rancap from the Philippines shares a story in an interview with Bearing Witness.



“BORN AGAIN” IN THE GLOBAL CHURCH

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

Nearly five years ago—the exact date was October 26, 2010—I was “born again” ... again!

For many years, I, along with my colleagues at the [Mennonite Historical Library](#) (MHL), had been conscientious custodians of a long tradition of “scholarship for the church” bequeathed to us by historians like Harold Bender, Guy Hershberger, John Oyer, The-ron Schlabach, Shirley Showalter, and Alan Kreider.

These amazingly gifted scholars were committed to bringing their academic disciplines into conversation with the life of the church. Convinced that the life of the mind and spiritual/ ecclesial renewal were intimately related, they offered a model that combined scholarship and teaching with a deep love for the church. In the fall of 1985, when I was facing a difficult decision about where I wanted to teach as a young historian, their example inspired me to accept a call to [Goshen College](#).

In the years since, my colleagues and I have worked hard to be good stewards of their legacy. We greatly expanded the holdings of the MHL, continued to publish [The Mennonite Quarterly Review](#), supported the work of the Mennonite Historical Society, wrote books and articles, organized conferences, hosted lecturers, and preached in many congregational settings.

Along the way, however, something of profound significance was happening within the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. All around the world—but especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—churches bearing the Mennonite name were exploding in growth. And as they did so, they were translating the good news of the gospel into the realities of their own cultural context.

In dozens of new settings, what it meant to part of this 500-year-old “Anabaptist-Mennonite” stream was being stretched, challenged, renewed, transformed, and re-imagined.

In 2009 I attended the [Mennonite World Conference](#) (MWC) assembly in Asunción, Paraguay and witnessed first-hand the astonishing diversity of our global family. I returned to Goshen College convinced that the time had come for a new kind of “scholarship for the church.” After consulting with a wide range of colleagues and friends, the concept of the “Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism” emerged.

“I returned from Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay convinced that the time had come for a new kind of ‘scholarship for the church.’”

On October 26, 2010, Goshen College administrators approved a memo of understanding that formally launched the ISGA. The vision and projects of the Institute have been a part of my daily life ever since.

During the past five years, doors have been opened in ways that have allowed the work of the ISGA to flourish. A host of institutions, foundations, and private individuals have supported our vision with generous financial

contributions. For the past four years I have served as secretary of the MWC Faith and Life Commission, a position that has led to dozens of new relationships within our global fellowship and opportunities for partners hip.

For the past three years I have been writing monthly columns for [The Mennonite](#) and the [Mennonite World Review](#) focused on some aspect of the global church. My colleagues in the MHL, particularly Joe Springer, have lent their enthusiastic support to the ISGA as we have worked to broaden the scope of our collection. Last year, the addition of Elizabeth Miller as a part-time staff person has been an enormous gift; and more than a dozen Goshen College students have participated in some aspect of our work.

Last month marked a milestone in a major project of the ISGA, and an enormous step forward for another. As you can read in this issue of *Rhizome*, on July 26-30 nearly 40 Research Associates and church leaders met at [Elizabethtown College](#) to analyze the results of the Global Anabaptist Profile—the first major study of faith and practices of Mennonite World Conference churches.

Cross-cultural surveys are enormously challenging (the questionnaire was translated into 26 languages!), and interpreting the results will take time. But the GAP is a pioneering initiative—not just for MWC, but also in the world of global Christian scholarship—and we hope that project will bear much fruit.

The [Bearing Witness](#) project, with significant support from the Bruderhof, is also now moving into a new phase, with a strong presence on the internet, an expanding collection of stories (helped especially by a host of interviews at the MWC assembly), and work on a new book of testimonies that will be published later this year.

Clearly there are enormous challenges and possibilities still ahead. We continue to operate on a shoestring budget, spending most of our resources to support the work of others. And I am often behind in my commitments, struggling to find the right balance of priorities. But today, five years after the ISGA was launched, I wake up eager to launch into the tasks at hand and more grateful than ever for the opportunity to continue a long tradition of “scholarship for the church.”

Thank you for your support!

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