STORIES FROM THE GLOBAL MENNONITE CHURCH

# The growth of Pentecostal movements

**IN SEPTEMBER**, while meeting with Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI) pastors in the Los Angeles area, I attended a revival meeting called "Unlimited Fire L.A.," led by Anton Sidharta and Iman El Roi, two young JKI pastors from Indonesia.

The JKI church they represent traces its origins to a small group of Indonesian students who attended Fuller Seminary. In 1977, the group began to meet for regular Bible study and prayer under the leadership of Sutanto Adi. At the time, Adi was a member of the Gereja Kristen Muriah Indonesia (GKMI) church in Indonesia, a synod with strong connections to Mennonite World Conference and the broader Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Out of that prayer meeting emerged a renewal movement strongly influenced by Pentecostal forms of worship, including speaking in tongues, faith healing, prophetic words and visions. Adi returned to Indonesia, where the movement—known as Sangkakala ("trumpet")—rapidly expanded, bringing into its orbit a wide range of other independent Pentecostal groups. Since 1985, the JKI church—now separated from the GKMI—has expanded into an association of some 223 congregations (including eight in the Los Angeles area) and numbering some 40,000 members. Like GKMI, JKI is a member of MWC; one of its congregations in Semarang will serve as the host of the 17th MWC global assembly in July 2021.

What interested me most during my visit to Los Angeles was the challenge that JKI, like all Pentecostal groups, faces in maintaining a strong ecclesial identity as well as the spiritual vitality that first gave rise to the movement. A characteristic of many Pentecostal groups is a suspicion of organizational structures, confessional statements and clear membership guidelines. One reason Pentecostal movements can move so easily across cultures around the world

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is that they are not tied to specific liturgies or creeds or anchored in denominational traditions. They also generally do not have firm educational requirements for pastors, which allows a wide range of lay people to enter easily into leadership positions.

JKI is now moving into its second generation of leadership, which means that questions of identity and ongoing renewal are going to be crucial in the coming years. According to pastors Anton and Iman, the "Unlimited Fire" initiative is an effort to recapture the spirit of the Sangkakala movement for a new generation. Yet they are also interested in their Mennonite connections.

Today, some 600 million Christians around the world identify as Pentecostals, and that number is growing rapidly. Within MWC, many groups consider themselves Pentecostal. The Meserte Kristos Church of Ethiopia, for example, the largest MWC national body, was born out of a charismatic branch of the East Africa Revival called Heavenly Sunshine. Amor Viviente, which started in Honduras, is another example. Like JKI, the worship practices and rapid growth of these groups reflect the larger story of global Pentecostalism.

Traditional Mennonites in North America are generally wary of Pentecostal expressions of faith and worship. It is easy to forget that Anabaptism emerged at a time of profound spiritual awakening, that its worship practices were unorthodox and many regarded the movement as chaotic and undisciplined. Claiming access to spiritual power always includes the risk of manipulation and personality cults, and in the biblical story the Spirit is manifested in many different forms. But we would be foolish to ignore the reality of the Pentecostal movement in the global church. And we would be arrogant to turn our noses up at brothers and sisters—now the majority in the MWC family—whose first worship language includes the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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