

“World Fellowship Sunday: Migration and the Anabaptist-Mennonite Story”

By: Steve Ramer, Pastor

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Gathering (Katie)

We welcome each one of you to this gathering, where we all have the same nationality as children and heirs in the kingdom of God. We are grateful for God’s love and mercy to all, no matter where we come from. Everyone is welcome to this place, and to feel at home.

Jesus is our example, who was a migrant as a child, excluded and killed as an adult. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are invited to understand that we are pilgrims, citizens of another kingdom, not of this world. Many of us have also been migrants, or have ancestors who have been migrants. As a church, we are called to love, empathize and to act, lest we, too, exclude others by our own indifference.

We are gathered to affirm our commitment to being an open-door church that facilitates the welcome to those who are our sisters and brothers no matter where they come from. A church that contributes to a change of attitude and mentality in our society.

Let us Pray. Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the strangers and the sojourners who come to our land, escaping from oppression, poverty, persecution, violence and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear, doubt, even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds. Help us with your grace to banish fear from our hearts, that we can welcome those who are refugees with joy and generosity while responding to their needs.

Responsive Reading: Based upon Luke 4:18-21 (Katie)

Leader: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;

All: Forgive us, Lord, for the times our actions have not been consistent with the message of Good News to the most vulnerable.

Leader: He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,

All: Forgive us, Lord, for the times we have not looked after the needy, the marginalized and the exiled due to our lack of love and lack of commitment to your Word.

Leader: and recovery of sight to the blind,

All: Forgive us, Lord, for the times our works have not been motivated by your love.

Leader: to let the oppressed go free,

All: Forgive us Lord, for the times we have not stood on the side of your justice and truth on behalf of the exiled and the outcasts.

Leader: to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

All: Help us, Lord, to put your Word into action, taking the Good News to all who suffer in a foreign land.

Leader: And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

All: Lord, we commit to ensuring that the preaching of your Word becomes a reality in daily life, through the witness of our actions on behalf of those who suffer displacement due to violence and social injustice.

Leader: Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

All: Lord, we commit to taking the Good News to all who suffer the pain and loss of displacement. Hallelujah, yours is the Glory and Honor forever and ever! Amen.

Message/Sermon (Steve)

Nearly 500 years ago, Anabaptists were persecuted because they claimed primary citizenship in God's kingdom. Anabaptists recently celebrated 100 years of presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Latin America is experiencing a large displacement crisis, where organized crime, violence and poverty are forcing thousands to flee their homes. Migrants, including Anabaptists, face hardship as they seek safety. Our churches, both in "El Norte" and in the "south" are investing in missional outreach to these vulnerable people.

Anabaptist Christians today are called to follow Jesus in his ministry of justice-making. This includes welcoming migrants. In Latin America, Anabaptist churches are composed of both those who have been migrants, and those who welcome migrants. It is not easy to be or have been displaced, nor is it easy to welcome these strangers. God is faithful in the midst of these stories of uprootedness and change.

"From foreigner to family"

Sometimes people are excluded and marginalized, "strangers or foreigners" in their own land. Society has its "foreigners," people it puts aside, regarding them as strangers who do not conform to social norms. The gospel approaches these people and invites them to participate. The gospel invites the church to treat them with dignity, hospitality and with attention. Marginalization annuls them. The church gives dignity that affirms their identity as beloved. The church invites them to enter the community of the kingdom of God. The church moves them from that foreign place to being at home.

“We have learned...” (reading by Martha)

The problems in Venezuela affect the economy, relationships, health services, crime, insecurity, public services, corruption, politics, malnutrition and inflation. We decided to come to Colombia to improve the living conditions of our families, look for new opportunities and have a change in our lives. On arrival, we suffered a heavy emotional blow when we saw other Venezuelans living in a state of begging. It was hard to compare the economy of Colombia to Venezuela: we suffered a lot when we saw the amount of food in supermarkets, stores, marketplaces and warehouses, food that is not available just across the border in our own country.

Thank God, we are very grateful to the people who welcomed us in their country. We have received no assistance from the state. We did not intentionally decide to come to the church. Rather, we think it was God who brought us here, since we did not know that the Mennonite church existed. Now Carlos has been baptized and is a member of the church. We have known God here in this church. Every day, we receive a word through the pastor and the children’s ministry. We have received unconditional support, a lot of love, and accompaniment every day from Riohacha Mennonite Church.

In this church, we have learned to listen to the Word of God through devotions, Sunday school and prayer vigils, and we have learned to live in community, to help each other. We have learned to accept our change of life. We have learned to value people, our family, our friends, those who help us every day. We thank God first for all the support received in this place, to the pastor for teaching the Word, to the Sunday school teacher for allowing us to help out in the work with the children. We have learned a lot about caring for people who are elderly, which is the ministry of the Mennonite church in Riohacha. We have learned about brotherhood and unity. We have learned to love God. For this reason, we thank the Mennonite church for taking us in and giving us the opportunity to continue growing spiritually.

—Venezuelan migrants welcomed to the Iglesia Menonita de Riohacha, Colombia

“Surrender to life and its flow” (reading by Kevin)

Clara arrived in Ecuador with her family from Tumaco, an area of Colombia marked by violence. In Tumaco, she obtained a teaching position at a school and found for a time the tranquility and economic stability she wanted. But soon she and her family were the target of threats and extortion by an armed group, because they had not given the required “contribution.” The armed group wanted to kidnap her children and recruit them for the guerrilla movement. Clara was threatened with death.

The International Red Cross helped Clara and her family to flee Colombia and come to Tulcán, then to Quito. Because all of her places of safety and welfare had collapsed, she was now on the streets, asking for help to survive. None of her many academic degrees served her at this time. She stayed locked up in her house with her children and companion because she felt that she was still being persecuted, that Ecuador was not a safe place either. Her son, a brilliant

young man in school, did not accept an opportunity to study because he was afraid that the group from Colombia would find him and kill him.

How could Clara live with so much fear? How could she make life continue to flow in the midst of all this pain? That is the task the church is working on with Clara and her family. Clara is in a therapeutic process that helps her untangle the emotional knots and accept her new reality, not with resentment and resignation, but from the surrender that allows her to align with life and its flow. Clara and her family participate faithfully in the church, because they have felt loved and welcomed. The church's project has given them all the emergency aid they have needed.

“The song remains: Hope in Honduran gang territory” (reading by Maurice)

For more than 20 years, gangs clashed in Chamelecón neighborhood in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. The main street served as an invisible border, marking off the territory of the two dominant gangs. Even for people who weren't in gangs, it was dangerous to cross the street.

This neighborhood is home to Vida en Abundancia, a Mennonite church. In 2008, the congregation felt called to start a primary school to shield the children from the influence of gangs. However, the violence continued. Police and gangs fought in front of the school and even once inside the school before classes began. In 2013, threats to the security of the teachers and students was so great that the school had to close. The church accompanied its 38 students in the process of changing to schools outside the community.

In spite of all the fear in the community and reduced size of their own congregation, the church was determined to spread hope. Unable to influence the school anymore, the remaining members went beyond the safety of the church building to carry out activities in all corners of the neighborhood, making “God-music” stronger than the sound of weapons.

The leader of the gang that controlled the territory heard the song and was drawn to seek out the pastor. With some trepidation, pastor José Fernández presented himself as the one the gang leader was looking for. “No one touches this pas- tor,” the gang leader instructed his followers. That moment strengthened the church's resolve. Little by little, young people began to arrive at the church fleeing the horror of that world of violence and resentment.

Hope began to grow again. People began to re- turn. Last year, the school reopened. Adolescents being developed in a mission program also contribute to the community.

The little church that remained steadfast in spite of hardship is flourishing, trumpeting out a song of hope to drown out the sound of violence.

—As told to Oscar Suárez, YABs committee member for Latin America

"Home"

by Warsan Shire (British-Somali poet)

*no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.*

*you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.
your neighbors running faster
than you, the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body, you only leave home*

when home won't let you stay.

*no one would leave home unless home chased you, fire under feet,
hot blood in your belly.
it's not something you ever thought about doing, and so when you did -*

*you carried the anthem under your breath, waiting until the airport toilet
to tear up the passport and swallow,
each mouthful of paper making it clear that you would not be going back*

*you have to understand,
no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land
who would choose to spend days and nights in the stomach of a truck
unless the miles travelled meant something more than journey*

*no one would choose to crawl under fences,
be beaten until your shadow leaves you,
raped, then drowned, forced to the bottom of
the boat because you are darker, be sold,
starved, shot at the border like a sick animal,
be pitied, lose your name, lose your family,*

make a refugee camp a home for a year or two or ten, stripped and searched,

*find prison everywhere and if you survive and you are greeted on the other side with go home
blacks, refugees, dirty immigrants, asylum seekers*

*sucking our country dry of milk,
dark, with their hands out
smell strange, savage -
look what they've done to their own countries, what will they do to ours?*

*the dirty looks in the street
the indignity of everyday life
insults easier to swallow than rubble,
forget about pride your survival is more important.*

*i want to go home, but home is the mouth of a shark, home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore unless home tells you to
leave what you could not behind, even if it was human.
no one leaves home until home
is a damp voice in your ear saying leave, run now, i don't know what i've become?*

Joys and Concerns (Katie)

- Prayers from MWC members in Latin America & the Caribbean
- Pray for Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, the countries from which the greatest number of people are trying to escape from violence or leaving in search of economic opportunity.
- Pray for the countries receiving Latin American migrants, such as Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, the USA and Canada
- Give thanks that Anabaptists around the world are united in faith in God's kingdom across language and cultural differences.
- Pray that Anabaptist churches all over the world will be responsive to the needs of newcomers in their communities.
- Pray that MWC members who are suffering persecution and hardship may have the courage and hope to persevere.

"Prayer of the migrant" (read by Kevin)

My Lord,

Here I am on the path heading north.
I bring with me everything and nothing.
I have my roots, which have already been taken
out of the land you lent to me.

I leave my homeland, my friends, my family.
I leave my people and my culture.

I don't have much left: I only bring my backpack, but I carry it full of faith, of dreams, of hope.

I also bring a heart full of sadness. One day I wish to return, back to my loved ones. I don't know if I will arrive to the land of my dreams.

Lord, I only ask that you do not leave me alone on this path heading north.

I believe that at least you understand me. You were also a migrant and had a family from which you were exiled.

Lord, I ask for all the migrants like myself that we will never lose the faith and the hope of arriving to the promised land.

(Signed Jorge Reyes, this prayer was posted on the “spiritual corner” of a bulletin board at Casa Tochan, a migrant shelter for young men in Mexico City.)

“A new day will come”

A day will come

in which living will not be a heavy burden

but rather a wonderful experience of abundance for all people,

no matter their origins, color, country or religion; a day when freedom will not be a dream

but rather a happy reality for all people;

in which equality will not be called into question irrespective of people’s culture, social status, sex and wealth,

nor will it require affirmative action;

a day in which fraternity

will be the best expression of citizenship,

dignity and respect.

A day will come

in which human rights

will not need defenders or laws,

because all of us will carry them in our bones;

a day in which justice

will bloom in every nook and cranny

and we will be able to see in every direction;

a day in which there will be no more refugee boats,

nor Lampedusas, nor refugee camps,*

or barriers, or walls, or deaths

on the seas, in the deserts or the far-flung corners of our countries;

a day in which all the borders will disappear and human beings can move freely in the world, from here to there, as we do in our own home.

A day will come

in which we can live together harmoniously, move freely,

dialogue,

respect one another,

*share,
critique,*

*help one another, enrich one another, sing,
dream,
work,
choose where to be,
and choose to be different.*

*A day will come in which
on all the walls and posters,
in all the magazines, newspapers, radios and televisions,
society will feel new in every way;*

*a day in which we worship, and love is respected,
because it means that it has taken root
in each and every one of our hearts.*

May this day come soon, Lord! We have already imagined it!

Florentino Ulibarri

*A Lampedusa is a cross made from the wood of refugee boats washed up on the shores of an Italian island in the Mediterranean Sea, first made by Francesco Tuccio as a show of solidarity with refugees fleeing Eritrea and Somalia and which he offered to survivors as a symbol of hope.

Benediction (Katie)

- Let us go now from this place of worship into the world as citizens of the kingdom of God. Go proclaiming the peace of Christ which passes all understanding. Go caring for the sojourner in our land and in the world.
- May the source of our inspiration be Christ Jesus, who in his love of the poorest and most needy demonstrated welcome and inclusion. May everything we do be done as if we are doing it to Jesus, and because we are one in Jesus.
- Go in peace, knowing that God is faithful in everything.

Steve Ramer

Pastor Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship
300 E. Oak St.
Ft. Collins, CO 80524
(970) 412-7510