



EXTENDING BEYOND

Jesus models mission

A message from Stanley W. Green, executive director

A circle of prayer in Quito, Ecuador, brings together people of multiple nationalities, including refugees.
Photo by Jon Carlson.



In a post-Resurrection appearance, John reports that Jesus offered God’s peace to the group of terrified and fearful disciples locked behind closed doors (John 20:21). Jesus adds to his benediction an important

elaboration: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Jesus makes it clear that God’s mission of restoration and reclaiming the world through the reconciling work of the cross will continue—through them.

Importantly, Jesus clarifies that not only is he sending them, but he is sending them as the Father sent him. In other words, our posture and approach in mission are prescribed by the example of Jesus. How did Jesus think about the nature of his mission? And what are the practices he modeled? Jesus gives us a clue in his words

and through his actions. In Luke 4, Jesus talked about his mission in this way:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In Mark chapter 10, he also says this, *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

The witness embedded in the manner of our engagement in mission should never contradict the spirit of Christian love, diminish the dignity of any human being, or communicate condescension toward potential sisters and brothers in the family of God.

Even though Western mission often found its emergence in noble motivations, unfortunately, its alliance with the historical quest for dominance and control—fueled by greed—sometimes meant that missionaries became agents of colonialism. The influence of the

colonial mentality on mission too often blinded missionaries to their own ethnocentrism. Cultural appropriations of the gospel were confused with

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For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 3:11

Mennonite Church in Argentina celebrates 100 years

By Zachary Headings with Laurie Oswald Robinson

Since the *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina* (Argentina Evangelical Mennonite Church) celebrated the 100th anniversary of its first baptisms on Sept. 27–29, its commitment to spreading the good news of Christ has grown stronger. During the festivities, church members and visiting North American partners reviewed the denomination’s history: from the first Mennonite missionaries, Mae and Tobias Kreider (T. K.) Hershey as well as Emma and Joseph Wenger (J. W.) Shank and their families, to the current work of its mission programs.

The early missionaries were sent by Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. By the mid-20th century, the Argentina Mennonite Church was taking responsibility for church planting, and by the mid-1990s, regional mission programs began forming.

In the historic central Argentine region of the church,

pastors organized *Visión Evangelística y Misionera de la Región Central* (VEMCE, formerly known as VEMZO). Their vision was to plant new churches and reestablish others that had been planted but that didn’t mature into stable congregations.

“The significance of the centennial is the celebration of the dream achieved by those who, ‘leaving everything,’ came to bring us the good news. They did not ‘look at it from afar,’ but believing in God’s faithfulness, they came,” said Sara Buhlmann, a retired gynecologist and current church planter with VEMCE.

While most VEMCE church plants are geographically close to existing congregations, the church in Carlos Casares sent workers six hours west to Villa Mercedes, San Luis, with the vision to plant both a business and a church.

Currently, Beraca Premoldeados, a creative block-making and construction business, provides income for the



Photo by Linda Shelly

In Villa Mercedes, Mónica Canan (far left) and her daughter, Loana, talk with church and business planter, Ramón Godoy, about how his arrival to build the fence behind them transformed their lives. Ramón came with a job to build a fence, but Mónica said his listening to her and then calling his wife, Mariana Romero, to share more deeply and pray together resulted in not only her commitment to Christ, but also to a church that has become family for them.



Photo by Linda Shelly

Clockwise beginning at left: In a partnership meeting, Daniel Oyanguren explains the mission strategy of *Visión Evangelística y Misionera de la Región Central* (VEMCE, formerly known as VEMZO). Ramón Godoy and Javier Miguel are mission workers who coordinate the broader ministries. Sara Wiegner (Akron, Pennsylvania) and Stephen Crane (Ridgeview, Pennsylvania) represent partner churches in an Atlantic Coast Conference cluster of churches in partnership with VEMCE.

church planters and creates jobs for people in the community. VEMCE anticipates partnering with Argentine businesspeople with a heart for mission moving into the next century, combining income-generating work with church planting in cities beyond their current locations.

In the mid-1940s, missionaries felt called to branch out beyond central Argentina to the indigenous people of the Chaco province. Through the decades, many North American missionaries served on the Mennonite team in the Chaco. By 2005, the team included a German family and three Argentine families. One of the Argentine families, Alfonsina and José Oyanguren, have led this ministry together with Toba Qom partners since 2011.

They work with indigenous leaders to support the use of the Toba Qom language through Bible ministries in the churches and at the *Centro Educativo Sañaten* (Qom Knowledge Educational Center). The Center hosts a recording studio and FM radio station, as well as multiple educational opportunities, including the Castelli Bible Institute and a program for high school completion. After graduating, students can continue their education to become bilingual teachers in a program that indigenous leaders and the Oyangurens also support.

Germán Díaz, a Toba Qom leader who works closely with Alfonsina and José, explained, “We continue to talk with students about studying and then coming back to participate with and for their people. We are trying to help them understand their history so their studies will help their people.”

“The challenge for the next century is the same,” Buhlmann said, “to carry the message ‘to every creature,’ with technological advances, yet not forgetting the model of Jesus, that the most important thing is ‘person-to-person’ communication.” ■



Photo by Linda Shelly

Mission worker José Oyanguren (left) visits with Toba Qom leader Germán Díaz about plans for the expansion of the *Centro Educativo Sañaten* (Qom Knowledge Educational Center). Germán and José have worked together on many proposals to improve educational opportunities for indigenous people.

Meet our mission workers



José and Alfonsina Oyanguren (back row, on right) along with their children, Emilia, Felipe, Tomás, and Juan (left to right), serve in Castelli, Argentina. They serve with indigenous churches and communities in the Argentine Chaco, providing continuity in long-term relationships and valuing indigenous languages and cultures.



Photo by Linda Stelly

Mennonite Mission Network's engagement is built on a commitment of mutual respect and partnership, which in the Argentine Chaco includes encouraging the use of the Toba Qom language. A new Toba Qom encyclopedic dictionary will soon be completed for use in the churches, schools and communities. In this 2013 photo, (left to right) Cornelio Castro, José Oyanguren, Germán Díaz, and Ismael Castro work together on the first letters of the alphabet.

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the gospel itself. Sadly, moreover, the cultural medium within which the gospel was transmitted was deemed to be superior. Mission thus devolved into telling unevangelized cultures how their inferior cultures would be enriched by an embrace of Western cultural forms and practices.

Determined to pattern ourselves after the example of Jesus, we at Mennonite Mission Network are striving to learn how to listen, show empathy and respect, and to cultivate mutuality in our mission engagements. Taking Jesus' injunction seriously demands that the witness of our approach, presence and lifestyle mirror the message we seek to proclaim in our words. The witness embedded in the manner of our engagement in mission should never contradict the spirit of Christian love, diminish the dignity of any human being, or communicate condescension toward potential sisters and brothers in the family of God.

David Bosch's influential text, *Transforming Mission*, has profoundly shaped thinking about mission in the 21st century, insisting that it be rooted in the transformation of all people engaged in the mission encounter. It is imperative that those who see themselves as called to share the gospel should also anticipate—indeed, even invite—transformation

with regard to their understandings of racism and injustice, ethnocentrism and cultural superiority, coercion and violence, along with the many other ills that encumber cross-cultural exchange.

Reflecting the Anabaptist influences on his thinking, Stanley Hauerwas has argued that the Church does not *have* but *is* a social ethic. Anabaptists have long insisted that the character of the kingdom community is its primary mission. At Mennonite Mission Network we believe we need constantly to be asking critical questions: How does our mission practice reflect the way of Jesus? How can we listen more than speak, and refrain from providing answers before we understand the questions? How can we be more self-critical of our own ethnocentric points of view and assumptions about our cultural superiority? Paradoxically, we believe that such humility will allow us to be more bold, and more honest, in our proclamation of the good news that is ours in Jesus Christ. Thanks for joining us on this journey of transformation and seeking to do mission in the way of Jesus. ■

Stanley W. Green

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Executive Director

Thank you for being part of what God is doing! How is God calling you to share in additional ways with Mennonite Mission Network?

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