Have you ever read the following passage and daydreamed about what it would be like to be there?

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” - Revelation 7: 9-10

We won’t know till we get to the other side, but we can get a taste of what John saw whenever Christians from around the world gather to worship Christ and follow him together.

We asked several people from CMC to talk about their experiences at previous MWC assemblies. Here are the responses.

Jon Showalter

“A RARE OPPORTUNITY INDEED”

From Jon, president of Rosedale Bible College, on memories that stand out for him:

I attended MWC in Zimbabwe in 2003. One of the striking memories for me is the generosity and graciousness of the local hosts in a context of considerable hardship and economic instability. I remember the big pots of food being prepared over fires behind the cafeteria area where we were served. The worship services were moving. Brothers and sisters from all over the world gathered to sing and pray together across the divides of language and culture.

A special treat for me was spending time with a young leader from the Ecuadoran Mennonite Church with whom I had worked closely twenty years earlier when Dawn and I lived in Ecuador. He was sent to MWC as a representative of the Ecuadoran church, and it was a strange but wonderful experience to spend time with him again, but in a setting so foreign to both of us.

Ah, the music! One evening early in the conference I attended a choir festival at a nearby Brethren in Christ church. Ensembles and choirs from around southern Africa took turns singing, and... the energy and rich textures of African a cappella rhythms and harmonies were simply amazing.

What did you learn by being there that you could not easily have learned any other way? Riding the bus from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to Johannesburg, South Africa, complete with a memorably chaotic border crossing in the middle of the night, left me with a deeper understanding of the realities and challenges of life in that part of the globe.

Why should people from CMC be eager to participate? The MWC assembly happens only once every six years, and having it so close to where most of us live is a rare opportunity indeed. That in itself is a good reason to consider going.

Talk about the price for North Americans: Given the unevenness with which the world’s resources are distributed, there’s simply no way that this gathering can happen without those of us who’ve been given more helping to share the costs of brothers and sisters who live with so much less. And unless the gathering includes a significant number of Mennonites from around the world, it loses much of its appeal. We can gather relatively easily with lots of people like us whenever we decide to. MWC is so valuable precisely because of the ethnic and geographic diversity of its participants, but that is only possible if some people pay a lot more than others.
Jewel Showalter

“A GOOD REMINDER OF WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE A MINORITY”

Jewel, who attended numerous MWC assemblies during service assignments with Rosedale Mennonite Missions and Eastern Mennonite Missions, on past assemblies:

A memory from MWC in Zimbabwe: We knew the country was being strangled by the policies of a corrupt dictator who was lining his own pockets and that of his cronies at the expense of his people. Most people were sliding deeper into poverty as inflation made money almost worthless. Yet in the midst of these nationwide struggles, the Brethren in Christ churches hosted us beautifully—sharing what they had. At meal time we stood in long lines waiting for food as their teams cooked food in large cauldrons outside over wood fires. We ate greens and corn porridge with bits of meat.

In Calcutta, India, we were advised to wear long skirts in respect for our Indian hosts. We met outside under huge tents built for the occasion and enjoyed rice and curry at every meal. Although surrounded by poverty and pollution—again we caught a glimpse of heaven as we saw people from "every tribe, tongue, and nation" all struggling to understand each other and worship together. What will we sing in heaven?!

In Africa the worship took on an African flavor, in Paraguay, a Latin flavor. Most songs were sung in English, but there was simultaneous translation into Spanish, German, and French. In Paraguay the platform language was Spanish so we had the experience of needing headphones, a good reminder of what it feels like to be a minority.

What did you learn by being there that you could not easily have learned any other way? I felt like I was in the minority—that the church of Jesus Christ is growing more rapidly around the world than in North America—and I want to learn from these brothers and sisters in Christ who are so courageously reaching out to the unreached people groups in their countries. I always come back feeling like I am "rich in things and poor in faith."

On several occasions, in Paraguay, Canada, France, we've had the privilege of staying with host families. These have always been occasions for deeper connections than the public meetings afford. If any CMC people in Pennsylvania have the opportunity of hosting international guests, that is always an honor and a special opportunity of connection.

Why should people from CMC be eager to participate? What can they contribute? Especially for folks from CMC who have not had an opportunity to connect with the international church, MWC is an excellent opportunity—this year, right in "our own back yard"—to get a feel for the global church of Jesus Christ in one of its expressions. Many of those who come are from churches that were planted by North American Mennonite missionaries over the past 100 years.

Coming to MWC . . . shows solidarity with the global Anabaptist family. It shows, "We're interested in learning about you, your faith and challenges. We want to be your brothers and sisters in Christ in spite of the miles and cultural differences. We want to feel your joys and sorrows." If we don't maintain these ongoing connections with the churches we've helped to plant (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Ecuador, etc.) it feels like we've given money for "birth" but don't want to continue walking in relationship with "adolescents and adults."

I know the price seems high, but it's a lot cheaper than taking your family and traveling to each continent to connect with the churches there. The pricing builds in assistance for brothers and sisters from the Global South who have much lower incomes and have more expenses getting here. Can we think of our registration fees as a contribution to world missions?

Ben and Rose Shirk

“MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE LORD”

Ben is the CMC representative to Mennonite World Conference and sits on the General Council. He and Rose attended MWC Assembly 15 in 2009 in Asunción, Paraguay. Both of them valued meeting people from so many different countries, knowing, as Rose said, that “these were our brothers and sisters in the Lord.”

They also enjoyed the free time built into each day, which gave them a chance to meet new people, reconnect with old friends and acquaintances, and visit the Global Church Village, a tradition at MWC assemblies. People can visit the Village to relax, meet friends, view cultural and church displays, and try out snacks from various cuisines.

Rose and Ben got hooked on the chipas: small doughnut-
shaped breads baked with manioc flour and aged cheese. They got them at conference, but also bought them on the streets: “We loved those chipas!”

An amusing window into conference planning and cultural differences: Yerba mate, the hot drink of choice in Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, and southern Brazil, was available everywhere at the Assembly. Conference organizers, said Ben, were not prepared for the arrival of 3,000 Europeans and North Americans who were in desperate need of a cup of coffee.

After the first day, he said, they saw “lots more coffee pots around.”

For both Shirks, the biggest reason to attend MWC is to “experience the global community of Anabaptist believers.” It is “an amazing time of expanding your understanding and meeting people,” said Ben. And it is amazing, too, to worship with 6,000 believers singing “the same songs back and forth in German, Spanish and English.”

Plus, he added, MWC “only comes to North America every thirty years.”

Join in Prayer for MWC 2015

If you’d like to pray for MWC 2015, here are weekly prayer themes. To find out more, please visit:

mwc-cmm.org/article/prayer-network

Sunday  Hospitality/Fellowship  Monday  Worship  Tuesday  Finances  Wednesday  Visas  Thursday  Safety, Travel, Health  Friday  Youth Summit, Youth, Children  Saturday  Wisdom & Discernment

CMC is participating in Assembly Scattered, which allows guests to visit MWC churches and ministries on the way to or from Assembly Gathered. CMC’s next annual conference (July 16 - July 19 in Hartville, Ohio) provides a way for our international guests to experience church life in North America.

Look for more news about MWC 2015 in upcoming Beacon issues. We hope to cover the role that two people from our affiliate conference Asociación Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas de Costa Rica will be playing this year at MWC. Aaron Gonzales is the Administrative Assistant in the Assembly organizing office in Akron, PA; Sandra Campos Cruz, who is on the MWC Executive Committee, will play “an important role in representing Latin America,” according to Lynn Roth, the North American rep to MWC.

We will also write about the seminar that RBC adjunct faculty member Abraham Ndungu will be presenting with Glenn Schwartz, the author of When Charity Destroys Dignity, at the Global Gathering which precedes MWC 2015. The seminar title is “Premeditated Sustainability in Church Planting within Cross-Cultural Settings.”

Rosedale Bible College’s
Choral Camp
2015
June 29–July 3 or July 6–10
A one-week camp for children who’ve completed grades 2-8
Register now at rosdale.edu