

EXTENDING BEYOND

Having faith that God will make things new

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Wschodni on Unsplash.

A message from Mike Sherrill



The seasons are changing. We are now in a new year and in a time when the daylight lasts longer and trees are beginning to bud with new life. There is a clearer way through the tragic COVID-

19 pandemic. As we do during the Lenten season, we acknowledge that we are stewards of our faith in the God who walks with us and makes all things new, even in times of change.

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to remind the people of Israel of God's faithfulness in bringing about change in difficult situations. Isaiah 43 paints a picture of the people of Israel journeying out of Egypt, through the miraculous parting of boisterous sea waves. And since the Great Deliverer did this for their ancestors, they can expect that they also would be delivered from their exile.

In Isaiah 43:19, the Lord says, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (NSRV). God has always been faithful and, being in the business of knowing people's needs, walks with them into the new life that the Creator has always intended for them.

At Mennonite Mission Network, we are blessed to know that we do not just claim that this promise applies to us today. We rejoice that the mission of God to show love to the world has never stopped, nor did the faithfulness of God and God's people. Mission Network has continued to partner with our brothers and sisters in the U.S. and around the world, to support innovative ways of showing the love of Christ to our neighbors and honoring him, even during a pandemic.

God walks with us, through our personal
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"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

— Isaiah 43:19
(NRSV)

Being resilient in the face of pandemic

By Zachary Headings

The world has witnessed some especially difficult times in the past year. All of humanity's institutions have been touched, if not shaken to their very core, by the events of 2020. The pandemic has shown us vulnerability, certainly. It has also shown us what it means to be resilient.

Resiliency is a good word for the human race during this time. Despite everything — all the hardships, all the strife — people have persisted. Mennonite Mission Network's personnel and partners have also adapted to these new realities.

Burgos, Spain

Brian and Noelia Fox are great models of this resiliency. They have demonstrated creative partnering in their work with ministries in Burgos, Spain, where they serve with their daughters, Elisa, Mikaela and Norah. When the pandemic first hit, the Spanish government ordered a nationwide shutdown. This affected their church family at *Iglesia Evangélica Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* (United Anabaptist Communities Evangelical Church). It also forced them to make changes in their after-school English academy, which is attended by more than 100 students.

After a few weeks of uncertainty, the Foxes facilitated online classes for their students. "This was all new, and we did have some difficulties the first couple of days," Brian Fox said. "But once we got going, we realized this could be the way for us to continue for the time being. While not every class has been a success, most classes have gone really

well." The Foxes plan to finish the current school year with online classes.

Time spent in prayer has been the cornerstone of their resiliency during this time of pandemic. "Prayer has been something that has kept our community moving forward," Noelia Fox said. "At the beginning of the pandemic, our church had a 24-hour prayer chain, which lasted for several weeks."

In fact, one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic, Brian Fox said, was that their family and community spend more time in prayer now than they did before. They also have learned to live more in the moment. Since it's nearly impossible to make plans, they live day by day and feel better for it.



Photo by Mikaela Fox

After the pandemic hit, the Foxes continued their after-school English academy by going online. Above, Brian Fox teaches a class from home.



Photo by Isaac Meréndez

Brian Fox preaches on a Sunday morning at *Iglesia Evangélica Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas*. The church live-streams the service, because the government has limited seating capacity. It also allows for those who do not feel comfortable meeting in person to be able to attend virtually.



Photos by Peter Wigginton

Due to the pandemic, the Wigginton Bravos' ministries had to move online and away from the dinner table. The needs of brothers and sisters who did not have enough food on their own tables helped Peter Wigginton and the community come up with an initiative to produce healthy food locally, with the labor of the church community. This new garden has become a place for liturgy, since the church building itself is not a safe place to congregate, due to COVID-19. In these photos, Ecuadorian and refugee church members work outside and break ground together, excited that they are starting to produce food that will be shared over dinner tables.

“For me, resilience means faith,” Noelia Fox said. “It means trusting God, even when things don’t make sense. It means praying for one another and encouraging one another to continue the race God has marked out for each one of us.”

Quito, Ecuador

Another example of resiliency comes from Delicia Bravo Aguilar and Peter Wigginton, who serve in Quito, Ecuador, with their daughters, Aliyah and Ariana. Prior to the pandemic, they frequently travelled around their partnership area to do trainings and workshops with local community leaders. Bravo Aguilar worked with an after-school program.

Like most things during the pandemic, these ministries have shifted, as best they can, to being online. “A lot of [our] ministry was focused around dinner tables and sharing food or tea,” Wigginton said. “This is obviously a lot more difficult since we haven’t been able to really leave home at all.”

Instead, their ministries have prospered online. Bravo Aguilar has shifted some of her after-school programming to Zoom and WhatsApp. And Wigginton has worked virtually with the music ensemble from their church, *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador* (Quito Mennonite Church). “This has been a great blessing,” Wigginton said, “We’ve been able to include folks from other congregations, and even other countries, in these worship videos.”

One of these videos, *La bendición* (The Blessing), served as Mission Network’s Christmas e-greeting.

The Wigginton Bravos improvised a lot during the pandemic and embodied resiliency by thinking of different ways to do ministry. They are also encouraging others to focus on these alternative ways of working. Staying connected with the community virtually, and even growing that community during a time when other people seem so far away — that’s more than resiliency. That’s the work of God. ■



Listen to *La Bendición* on our website: www.MennoniteMission.net/Christmas.

Join with Mission Network personnel and partners around the world as we give thanks for the resiliency of God’s work. Your gifts go to support ministries like the Foxes’ in Spain and the Wigginton Bravos’ in Ecuador. With your help, we will continue to remain resilient through 2021 and beyond! Thank you and may the Lord’s generous peace and grace be with you!

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deserts — the moments of our lives that are difficult and lead us to new situations. We are continually reminded that God has been with us before and continues to be with us now. And in this spring season, we also give thanks that we are able to rejoice with people all around the world through the Easter story — that, in the beautiful language of John 1:14, “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (NSRV). Through that walk, Jesus demonstrated sacrificial love — living with us, dying for us, and then saving us. Inspired by that, we demonstrate our thankfulness by acting out our love for our neighbor.



We are continually reminded that God has been with us before and continues to be with us now.

We have been so thankful for God’s faithfulness and the faithfulness of our neighbors. The events of 2020 were a challenging desert, and we are still in need of much renewal. Yet, God has not abandoned us, and we, the people of God, have not abandoned our calling. Mission

Network’s programs and presence continue, with our global faith community standing together in mutual encouragement and prayer. Deeply breathing in the nourishing Spirit is energizing fresh creativity and innovation, as we partner in our communal and urgent mission of love, across the street and around the world.

In this time of renewal, we appreciate your continued support. We are not alone, for God is always with us, and we are with each other on this journey. May you deeply experience the love of Christ this Easter season. ■

Mike Sherrill
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?

www.MennoniteMission.net
Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872

Office locations:
Elkhart, Indiana
Newton, Kansas

Meet our mission workers



Photo provided

Delicia Bravo and **Peter Wigginton** with their daughters, Ariana (left) and Aliyah Wigginton-Bravo (right), work in Quito, Ecuador. Bravo and Wigginton serve as Ecuador partnership coordinators and also in the church programs, using their gifts in music, education, and children’s and youth ministries. They walk alongside *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador* (ICAME), through the Ecuador Partnership, which includes *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* and Central Plains Conference.



Photo provided

Brian and **Noelia Fox** with their daughters, Elisa, Mikaela and Norah, serve in Burgos, Spain. They serve alongside the *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* (Mennonite church) in Burgos. They work with young couples in the church and in the community and nurture new leaders. The Fox family serves through the Association of Anabaptists, Mennonites, and Brethren in Christ Churches in Spain.