



**Mennonite
Mission
Network**

Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

The wind blows where it wishes

30 years of walking in the
Anabaptist faith in Ecuador

BY JULIÁN GUAMÁN AND PETER WIGGINTON

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world.

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Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Indiana, and Newton, Kansas, Mennonite Mission Network supports ministries in 54 countries and 31 states.

Mennonite Mission Network is committed as an agency to providing relevant resources for the church. *Missio Dei* is such a resource, inviting reflection and conversation about God's mission in 21st-century contexts. It is offered free of charge to more than 1,500 pastors and lay leader subscribers. Donations are welcomed to cover costs for additional copies.

ISBN 978-1-933845-05-8

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Printed in the United States of America.

Forward

“You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.” — John 3:8 (MSG)

Peter Stucky, of the *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (IMCOL—Colombia Mennonite Church), shared this verse in reflecting on all that has happened in Ecuador over the course of the past 30 years.

It was a fitting reference, leading Ecuador Partnership Co-coordinator Peter Wigginton to write, “In Greek and Hebrew, the words ‘wind’ or ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’ are interchangeable, and it is a symbol from nature that is used several times in the Bible (c.f., Job 33:4; John 20:22; Acts 2:2; Ezekiel 37:9-10). And over the years, and today, we have seen how God’s Spirit has moved in so many different places and through different congregations and people in Ecuador. We have not been able to see the Spirit move and do not know where it comes from, but we have been able to see and hear the effects of it, like the swoosh and swaying of the *páramo*, Andean tundra grasses. We have seen the manifestation of God’s hand.”

In March 2020, two anniversaries were celebrated in Ecuador. One anniversary marked 30 years of Mennonite Mission Network’s presence in Ecuador. The other marked 20 years of the partnership formed for ministry in Ecuador, which includes Mission Network, *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (IMCOL), and Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC), an area conference of Mennonite Church USA.

A delegation of international visitors from Mission Network, CPMC and IMCOL joined Ecuadorian partners during the anniversary celebrations and partnership meetings. Hosting the celebrations were two Ecuadorian conferences, *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador* (ICAME—Anabaptist Mennonite Christian Church), which was born directly through the partnership ministry, and *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita* (ICME—Mennonite Christian Church). ICME is a primarily Indigenous conference, whose Anabaptist theological roots began to take shape in the 1950s and then, developed more fully through the theological education ministry of the partnership.



Photo by Linda Shelly

From left, Peter Stucky of *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* thanks José Manuel Guamán for the poncho — which he removed from his own shoulders to give to Stucky, as a symbol of appreciation for his ministry — during the anniversary celebration, while Alexandra Meneses and Manuel Aguagallo observe with appreciation.

The anniversary worship service, “30 Years of Walking in the Anabaptist Faith in Ecuador,” was held in the southern Quito ICME church, *Camino de Salvación* (Way of Salvation). The evening featured music that represented the various cultures and worship styles of the Ecuadorian partner groups and an exchange of gifts. The partnership recognized and expressed gratitude for the many Ecuadorians who have contributed with their gifts, time and commitments throughout the past 30 years.

Julián Guamán and Peter Wigginton had the vision to share, in this booklet, the story of the past 30 years of walking together and the unexpected and surprising ways that God’s Spirit has moved. Guamán is the secretary of ICME and has done extensive research on the history of evangelical churches, with a focus on Anabaptism in Ecuador. Wigginton, along with his wife, Delicia Bravo, has served as co-coordinator for the partnership in Ecuador since 2015. This booklet includes both Guamán’s historical work and Wigginton’s reflections on the winds of the Spirit throughout the past 30 years and dreams for the future.

Credit for portions of this booklet should also be given to the chronology recorded through the years by the partnership and news articles written by Holly Blosser Yoder, Laurie Oswald Robinson and Dani Klotz.

Linda Shelly

Mennonite Mission Network Director for Latin America

The wind blows where it wishes

(Wairaka, maimantapish pukunllami in the Kichwa language)

By Julián Guamán and Peter Wigginton

Early Anabaptist presence in Ecuador

José Manuel Guamán grew up in the Indigenous Kichwa community of the Chimborazo region of Ecuador in the 1950s, so the educational opportunities available to him were primarily those offered by the Catholic church. At age 12, he taught the faith to others, under the tutelage of Bishop of Riobamba Leonidas Proaño.

Proaño, a leading liberation theologian at the time, advocated for Indigenous peoples' rights to land and water, as an application of Jesus' teaching in Luke 4:18. Guamán and the other catechists read in the Bible about release for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. They understood those teachings to be the basis of the church's work at that time.

In the 1970s, Guamán began to learn from a new teacher, Henry Klassen, a Mennonite missionary from Canada, working with an evangelical mission. The first part of the Luke 4:18 passage — “The spirit of the Lord is upon me” (NRSV) — took on new significance for Guamán. Worshiping in the evangelical church and learning about conversion and transformation, he felt the Spirit's power more intimately in his life.

The revelation that the Spirit would enter and act in his life was life-changing, propelling him into pastoral ministry. The Luke 4:18 passage that had been so important to his spiritual formation spoke to this calling as well: “he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Recalling his spiritual development, Guamán observed that, “When we accepted Christ, we understood that our lives had been poor, not only materially, but also spiritually.” Pointing again to the Luke 4 passage, he explained, “We have the responsibility to heal not only people’s lives but all of creation.” He observed Klassen preaching the gospel in word and deed, which included literacy work that responded to the desires of the Indigenous people to read the Bible, lead the churches and have a strong voice in their socio-economic political context.

For Guamán, fighting injustice had previously included using violence to defend Indigenous rights. But after experiencing the indwelling of Christ, he focused on using peaceful means to achieve justice. “When the Spirit is in our lives, we can understand the message of the Bible,” he said. He testified that years after a violent conflict between rich landowners and Indigenous people, one of those landowners sought him out and offered to pay the rent for a building used for ministry. They became friends and were reconciled.

As he matured in faith, Guamán recognized that Klassen not only baptized him in 1974 and ordained him as a pastor in 1978, but he also imparted a particular perspective on teaching and discipling followers of Jesus. He explained to Guamán that his own understanding of the gospel came from his Mennonite faith. However, he had not come to Ecuador to start Mennonite churches. “It’s better if you explore and then choose,” Guamán remembered Klassen saying.

Klassen was serving with what, at the time, was the Gospel Missionary Union. The first missionaries in Ecuador who identified denominationally as Mennonites were from the Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC). In 1980, missionaries began working on the Ecuadorian coast, mainly in the cities of Guayaquil and Manta, through Rosedale Mennonite Missions (now Rosedale International). Floods on the Ecuadorian Coast led CMC, together with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), to help affected families by providing humanitarian assistance, distributing food donations, and building houses. In 1986, a new conference, the *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Ecuador* (IEME–Ecuador Mennonite Church) was formed.

An invitation to Mennonite Board of Missions (a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network)

Thirty years ago, in 1990, Pastor José Manuel Guamán invited Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network) to a meeting in Ecuador. At the time, Guamán was president of FEINE, *Consejo de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Evangélicos del Ecuador* (Council of Indigenous Evangelical Peoples & Organizations). FEINE was concerned about finding a way to strengthen theological education in their churches and had heard of MBM's work with Indigenous evangelical churches in Argentina.

Gerald Mumaw, of MBM, accepted the invitation and attended the meeting in the valley suburbs outside of Quito, marking the starting point of a long relationship and work accompanying congregations and partners in Ecuador.

In 1992, Mauricio Chenlo and Sara Padilla arrived from Argentina — as MBM workers in Ecuador — to collaborate with FEINE. During their stay in Ecuador, which lasted until December of 1995, they worked on the training and formation of Indigenous youth, pastors and leaders, particularly in the province of Chimborazo; witnessing for justice and peace; and establishing relationships with other denominations.

Dialogues about the future of this ministry and possible partnerships continued throughout the 1990s. After the departure of MBM personnel living in Ecuador, César Moya, in his role as executive secretary of IMCOL, traveled to Ecuador, taught seminars and maintained relationships.

A partnership is born

In 2000, IMCOL, Mennonite Mission Network and CPMC were ready to form a partnership, and César Moya, his wife, Patricia Urueña, and their three children, Daniel, Juan Camilo and Andrea, were ready to be sent by Mennonite Mission Network, CPMC and IMCOL. This was IMCOL's first experience in sending mission workers to another country.

The partnership began meeting every 12-18 months. While most of the meetings have been in Ecuador, some have also been held in IMCOL or CPMC congregations — Colombia or the United States, respectively — in order to help broaden the understanding of the partnership ministries

to their constituencies.

Alix Lozano, former IMCOL president and seminary director, referred to the partnership using the analogy of a cord with three strands, which is strong and difficult to break. She noted that each partner brings gifts, and these gifts complement each other. She wrote:

“For the Colombia Mennonite Church, this experience has been very important, because there are contributions that each partner can make. Mission Network has brought a wealth of experience in mission, personnel and hiring workers. It is key to have a member that manages those issues. Central Plains comes with a wealth of church experience to offer, as well as a generous economic commitment.

“It has been a new experience and model of relating for the Colombia Mennonite Church. With finances, infrastructure and support personnel taken care of, our contribution has been human resources . . . We have given

spiritual accompaniment and vision from a Latin American perspective, through people and leadership with biblical theological pastoral formation. It was a process of discovering that no one came to the table with empty hands, that each one had a richness to offer.”



Photo provided

César Moya, Patricia Uruña and their three children: Daniel, Juan Camilo and Andrea



Photo provided

Peter Stucky and Alix Lozano from IMCOL; Ecuador workers Patricia Uruña, César Moya and Liliana Ocampo; Doyle Roth (seated) and Noreen Gingerich of CPMC; and Linda Shelly from Mission Network at the signing of the partnership covenant in 2003.



Patricia Uruña (back row, second from left), with participants in a course, that prepared Sunday-school teachers to use the Latin American Anabaptist children's curriculum, *Enseñanos tus caminos* (Teach us your ways).

Indigenous theological education in the early years of the partnership

During the 14 years that César Moya and Patricia Uruña served in Ecuador, they supported Indigenous theological education in a variety of ways, depending on local initiatives and the invitations available to them. The biblical and theological Indigenous training, focused in Chimborazo, was extended to other Indigenous leaders of FEINE-related organizations, and Pentecostal and other Protestant institutions also welcomed the Anabaptist theological education. Similarly, partnership relations with ecumenical entities and other Christian religious organizations were expanded.

In 2010, in a partnership including Mission Network, FEINE and *Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias* (CLAI—Latin American Council of Churches), Moya and Uruña, together with Indigenous leaders, published a set of twelve booklets for biblical, theological and pastoral formation, which were used broadly in the *Programa Pastoral Indígena* (Indigenous Pastoral Program) of FEINE.

A congregation is born

Moya and Uruña's initial assignment focused on Indigenous theological education, yet early planning for the Ecuador Partnership had also included the possibility of planting an Anabaptist church. Their theological training expanded to include students enrolled

in the *Universidad Cristiana Latinoamericana* and a nucleus of the *Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana* in Quito. Moya and Urueña felt that they needed a church context in order to teach theology from an Anabaptist perspective, and some of the students wanted this, also. The first service of the Quito Mennonite Church was held Easter Sunday, April 15, 2001.

There were early conversations regarding whether this congregation would be part of the existing IEME conference, in the coastal area of Ecuador, or whether it would have its own identity in Quito. With



Photo by Juan Madera

Patricia Urueña lights candles during the 2014 Advent season at Quito Mennonite Church in Ecuador.

time, the IEME decided, for multiple reasons, that expanding to include this congregation would not be a good fit, so the new Quito congregation operated under the spiritual umbrella of IMCOL.

While the broader socio-political context of the region is beyond the scope of this booklet, the reality of the armed conflict in neighboring Colombia has had a large impact on the development of the church in Quito. In 2002,

in response to Colombian refugees arriving at the church, the Quito congregation began a long-term ministry with the refugee population. Initially, people from the church shared their own possessions. As more refugees arrived and had additional needs, partnership funds were also allocated to the refugee ministry. From 2007–2012, the Anglican church in Ecuador partnered with the Quito church and provided some of the necessary funding and personnel. Mission Network worker David Shenk gave leadership during this time of development in the refugee ministry.

With support from MCC, the program grew, so that over the last several years, 80-100 refugee families have received assistance from the program each month; most refugees are from Colombia and Venezuela. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dire need to provide

food for people, since many refugees — who survive as street vendors or doing other informal labor — have not been able to work. During this time, thanks to the efforts of church volunteers and the generous donations received through Mission Network, the church — together with its refugee project — has been able to provide food rations for more than 200 families each month. Alexandra Meneses, co-coordinator of the church refugee project, which took the name *Proyecto para Personas Refugiadas y en Movilidad Humana* (Project for People who are Refugees and in Human Mobility), said, “We are a small community; however, God has allowed us to serve our brothers and sisters, accompanying them to find hope and be the visible and concrete presence of God in their lives.” Meneses reflected that the changing realities have been difficult and that the community has “had to adapt to new realities; we have been challenged to face crisis situations that have sometimes threatened to sink our boat. Our church, in the midst of so many challenges and uncertainty, has seen the fidelity of God that has accompanied us on this pilgrimage.”

In 2003, the congregation began to develop *Edupaz*, a peace education program for neighborhood children, to foster a culture of peace and nonviolence through monthly workshops. Ministry with children and youth in the *Jardines del Inca* neighborhood originally became known as *Vida Juvenil* (Youth Life) and is currently called *Edupaz Apoyo Escolar* (Edupaz School Support). It is a program that provides support and extracurricular learning opportunities, helps with homework, provides English classes, and complements all this



Photo by Marcel Rojas

Quito Mennonite Church volunteers and staff serving in the refugee project prepare food ration kits for refugee families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

with Bible lessons and crafts. These programs have not been able to continue in the same face-to-face modality during the pandemic, so the funds have been used to provide food for the families in the program.

The ministries with refugees and with children in different parts of Quito led to communities of worship in Calderón and *Jardines del Inca*, between the years of 2013 and 2017. Although the Calderón congregation met spiritual needs, it concluded its worship together when the refugees who made up the majority of the congregants left Ecuador. The people involved in *Jardines del Inca* decided to merge with the Quito congregation.

Although the work in Riobamba, Chimborazo, focused on Indigenous theological education, the relationships that had been developed through this work also resulted in a Spanish-language Mennonite church in that city. This new congregation was nurtured by Colombian and U.S. partnership workers from 2008-2014, after which local leadership made the decision to remain an independent congregation, rather than be part of a newly-forming conference.

Formation of the *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador* (ICAME)

In 2013, the Quito congregation was ready to work toward legal status in Ecuador, so they formed an all-Ecuadorian board and chose the name *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador* (ICAME). In September 2014, ICAME received approval of their official status from the government; however, the formal registration was delayed. The November 2014 partnership meeting acknowledged the importance of this step and entered into dialogue with ICAME to explore if the best option would be for ICAME to enter as a fourth partner in the partnership or take the role of local partner, defining their own vision and guiding the participation of the partnership in their country. ICAME chose to be the local partner, noting that, like other church conferences, they would want to relate with multiple partners in addition to the Ecuador Partnership, from which they were born.

Patricia Miranda Aguirre, the current president of ICAME, shared that she has participated in the congregation since 2002, and she has been grateful for the relationship with the Partnership, based in mutual respect. She has been blessed, she said, with being able to share with



Photo by Linda Shelly

César Moya (with microphone) and other pastors and lay leaders, past and present, pray a prayer of blessing and dedication for the current leaders and new church building in Quito.

so many people who have participated in the congregation over the years and host several of the younger Mission Network personnel in her home. “The church maintains a commitment to the work of the kingdom of God and to justice,” she said.

In May 2015, ICAME presented an official proposal to the Ecuador Partnership for the purchase of a property that would serve as base for their new conference, their ministries and the local Quito congregation. The purchase of a property on Isaac Albeniz Street, in the northern part of Quito, was finalized in 2017, and the new building was dedicated in January 2018.

Alba Silva, who served on the pastoral team at the time, said that the building was a dream fulfilled, and she declared that it would be God’s house for anyone who would like to come. She said, “Its purpose is to proclaim the kingdom of God through justice and peace.”

Formation of *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita (ICME)*

Ecuador has a long history of independent Indigenous evangelical churches. As some of these congregations developed a deeper understanding of Anabaptist theology, they decided to identify, officially, as Mennonite and broaden their fellowship with the Mennonite global body. These conversations started with ICAME, yet the process was slow, especially due to the legal regulations of the Ecuadorian government.

Previously, in 2010, these congregations had established a national



Photo by Linda Shelly

Partnership visitors participate, for the first time, in an ICME worship service, in 2018, at the *Camino de Salvación* church in southern Quito.

coordinating body and a manual for its operation. The coordinating body, in addition to being concerned with church planting, made efforts to strengthen the Anabaptist identity of the congregations and therefore, focused on training leaders and developing fraternal ties with other Mennonite churches.

On Sunday, January 21, 2018 — 493 years after the first baptism of believers carried out in the 16th century by Anabaptist brothers in Switzerland — in the building of the *Camino de Salvación* church, the congregations proclaimed the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective and adopted a new name: *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita* (ICME). They began the registration process, recognizing their dual roots in 1) the evangelization and teachings of Mennonite missionaries in Ecuador and 2) the planting of churches by Ecuadorian leaders and pastors.

Currently, the conference has eight congregations and focuses on their church planting ministry; Christian discipleship, rooted in Mennonite Anabaptist principles and values; leadership training in Mennonite Anabaptist identity; and service to the community, as an expression of the love of God.

Two-way mission

In 2015, with FEINE's encouragement to revitalize work with Indigenous communities in the Amazon basin, Mission workers Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer, with their four children, Sierra, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan, started a new journey. They are implementing a new model of mission, which



Photo by Linda Shrely

Naomi Ross Richer, together with Cofán children and youth, participates in a church service in Zábalo.

they have called “two-way mission.” They spend six months each year in Amazonian Ecuadorian Indigenous Cofán and Kichwa communities and six months each year in Goshen, Indiana, where they speak in multiple settings, and Jerrell serves as an economics professor at Goshen College. Their work accompanying church leaders in Tena, in the Napo province, and Zábalo, in the Sucumbios province, has been inspired by Mission Network’s work in the Argentinian Chaco. They focus on being neighbors; empowering women, children and youth; and encouraging theological development, creation care and community development in local cultural perspectives.

Networking, relationships and many opportunities

The partnership, from its inception, established two clear priorities: Indigenous theological education and the formation of Anabaptist churches. Yet, a holistic approach also pulled personnel in interrelated directions, helping, for a time, with an Indigenous school in Cebadas, a small innovative school in Quito, and diverse initiatives for peace education and theological education with a broad population at the university level. Relationships with FEINE also opened opportunities for multiple fellowship and work teams from CPMC and IMCOL, who,

alongside Indigenous brothers and sisters, helped with the construction of churches and a school. Learning tours, Youth Venture teams, Journey International and short-term service also gave opportunities for people from CPMC, IMCOL and the broader Mennonite Mission Network constituency to develop relationships and learn from partners in Ecuador.

Impact for partners in the Ecuador Partnership

When the Ecuador Partnership formed in 2000, the focus was on responding to an opportunity to serve in Ecuador. Yet, serving and learning go together, and the ministries generated a positive impact, not only in Ecuador, but also for the partners in Colombia and the U.S.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC): David Boshart, who related closely with the partnership during his years as conference minister wrote, in 2014, “As we think about leadership development, church planting and faithful witness in CPMC, we continue to draw lessons from what we have learned in our experiences with this international partnership: 1) Partnerships spark vitality. Partnerships provide opportunities to observe, together, the power of the gospel to bring transformation; 2) Partnerships convey legitimacy. Leaders of new congregations tell us that established communities, who have a long history of lived Mennonite beliefs, enable newcomers to trust that this movement is real, vital and offers a hope-filled future; 3) Partnerships develop new leaders. New expressions of the church become natural engines for developing new leaders. New churches make space for new leaders to emerge, because they must. New leaders will be needed for new ministries.”

Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia (IMCOL): At the anniversary celebration, Peter Stucky, pastor and long-term member of the IMCOL Missions Committee, said that forming a partnership with Mission Network and CPMC 20 years ago led IMCOL to recognize the need to organize themselves for effective mission work. “For IMCOL, becoming involved in the partnership 20 years ago led to the formation of our Missions Committee, which helped prepare us to also support ministry in Peru and Venezuela. In partnership with Mission Network, we also sent Diana Cruz and Felipe Preciado to serve in Benin, Africa. Sending Colombian church members to serve in Ecuador has been very formative.” German Velásquez, in his first

visit to Ecuador as part of the IMCOL Mission Committee, noted that, as partners in mission, it is encouraging to be able to share experiences that are helpful to others and also to learn from churches in another context.

Mennonite Mission Network: Linda Shelly, Mission Network's director for Latin America, observed that even though working together in a partnership can be complicated at times, "We certainly have seen the fruits, as each partner brings distinct gifts that contribute together in helping to fulfill the vision of the churches in Ecuador. I feel certain that had MBM, and then Mission Network, decided to respond alone to the invitation for ministry in Ecuador, the impact of the ministries in Ecuador would have been much lower. Partners brought vision, gifts and relationships that have all been important in this ministry together."

Recognizing the movement of God's Spirit in the past, present and future

The manifestation of God's hand has been seen in the Quito Mennonite Church, as they worked arduously to develop a pastoral model that would work for them. A model that would be Ecuadorian and intercultural at the same time. A model that is truly Anabaptist and a Quiteño Anabaptist reality. The church worked to develop a volunteer pastoral team that would be supported by volunteer commissions or missions. The Spirit is still moving, as they prayerfully continue working out the hitches and seeing how they can best serve God.

The winds of the Spirit at times were gusts and at other times were a breeze in the ICME churches, as they have also worked to develop a truly Ecuadorian Indigenous Anabaptist theology and identity. The seed of Anabaptism was planted many years ago and then accompanied in its growth by different people, over a long period of time. God was present in 1990, when José Manuel Guamán was encouraged to reach out to Gerald Mumaw, from the Mennonite Board of Missions, to see if the mission board could partner with FEINE to work on leadership training and theological education. The spirit continued moving in 2018, when, as a group of congregations, they decided to reach out and ask to become part of the broader Anabaptist/Mennonite world, by working towards membership in the Mennonite World Conference, fulfilling their wish to broaden their communion and help develop



Photo by Peter Wigginton

Delicia Bravo (with baby Ariana) and Alba Silva share with a refugee mother (name withheld) the benefits of the diaper covers and cloth diapers and ways to take care of them so that they last for multiple babies.

the warp and weft of the global Anabaptists movement.

The winds have been blowing, by evidence of the chonta palm trees swaying above, where Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer, with their family, share the Gospel of Matthew with Hiter Yiyoguaje, a Cofán Indigenous church leader. They see God’s Spirit in action, as youth choose to study at the Indigenous Ninawachi Mission Institute, where they dream together about how they will be a part of what God will do in their Amazonian Indigenous communities. The Ross Richers see their work in South America intrinsically connected with their work teaching and sharing with congregations in the United States. They also have opportunities to bring groups from North America to experience the Amazonian rain forest and connect with Indigenous communities. They are able to use experiences, both teaching and learning, in each culture and apply them to the other cultural reality. The Spirit is active in their “two-way mission.”

God’s hand has been present upon the work of refugee women in Quito, as they work with Delicia Bravo to sew cloth diapers, bibs and clothing, which are given to refugee families, who otherwise would have very little for their babies. Bravo has allowed God’s Spirit to take her love of sewing and creating things and join it with her experience and love of child-rearing to support refugee babies and the environment. There are

many refugee families that come to the Quito Mennonite Church, asking about the cloth diapers. Each family is added to a list, and about once each month, several mothers are called to the church, where they learn from Bravo how to take care of the diapers, and they also have an opportunity to share the experiences, troubles and excitement of raising babies.

For many years, the consoling wind has been felt in the Mennonite Church of Quito, when they have walked alongside refugees in Ecuador, who have fled from places like Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and now, Venezuela. They have offered a place to listen, a place to cry and a place of doxology in weekly worship services and other spaces, as well. They have offered a gentle guiding hand in the complicated reality of being in Ecuador, sometimes without documentation. The Spirit, working in the church's refugee project, together with support from Mennonite Central Committee, has been seen through the waves that form when the wind blows over the waters.

The church refugee project, through the work of two Ecuadorian co-coordinators — Alexandra Meneses and Daniela Sánchez, with Alba Silva as the logistical assistant — serves more than 80 refugee families each month. They offer food rations and blankets, and some families with small children also receive stoves and gas canisters. Even with the winds blowing and sweeping into so many refugee family homes, there are still more and more refugees entering Ecuador every day, and the church program needs to cope with the reality that the help that they offer is not sufficient for all who are in need; they have to turn some people away. On Sundays, the doors are open to all, and in most services,



Photo by Linda Shelly

Alba Silva, Alexandra Meneses and Daniela Sánchez manage the Quito church refugee project, *Proyecto de Personas Refugiadas y en Movilidad Humana*.

there are more people from other countries than Ecuadorian nationals. The presence of the Holy Spirit is felt here, in the church services, and it remains throughout the week, when the women gather on Tuesday evenings and when the children gather on Saturdays once per month for the peace education workshops. COVID-19 precautions have led to many adaptations and changes, yet always with an effort to be inclusive.

This wind comes and goes and is also ever present. We can feel the sometimes-gentle prodding and other times a stronger gust. This wind joins us together, and as 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 encourages us, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (NIV).

We must be drawn close to the Holy Spirit, to the breath, and to the broader body of Christ in prayer to help us remember our goal and take joy in our difficulties. In times of rejoicing and in times when we don’t feel like rejoicing, at all times and in all circumstances, we must rejoice and pray and be excited about the fact that, even in trials, we will be able to rejoice when we draw ourselves close to the Holy Spirit and are drawn up by its gusts.

What is to come?

As the Anabaptist groups in Ecuador are drawn together by the presence of the Holy Spirit and in prayer, we are all encouraged to join them, as they dream about where the church will be led in the years to come. The Anabaptist community in Ecuador pleads for bread, for justice, for happier days, for peace in Ecuador as well as in neighboring Colombia and Venezuela. This community mourns together with their brothers and sisters that are suffering from political, economic and physical violence. We all must join them in their suffering, so that we may be blown on to hope.

I will be your God throughout your lifetime ...

I made you, and I will care for you.

I will carry you along and save you Isaiah 46:4 (NLT).

Hope will come in the breeze

The Ecuadorian church also awaits new paths, as they dream of planting new churches and draw from deeper within to find their true Ecuadorian Anabaptist and Ecuadorian Indigenous Anabaptist identities. These

People from outside of Ecuador, serving six months or more

(year indicates start date)

1992: Mauricio Chenlo and Sara Padilla (Argentina)

2000: César Moya and Patricia Urueña (Colombia)

2003: Liliana Ocampo (Colombia); Laura and Steve Nafziger (USA)

2005: David and Ericka Gingerich (USA)

2008: Don and Jan Rheinheimer (USA)

2009: Amelia Brandt (USA)

2010: Erica Hartman and Kelsey Hartman (USA); Rosebert Ipuz (Colombia); David Shenk (USA)

2012: Luz Marina and William Valencia (Colombia)

2013: Alyssa Rodriguez (USA); Caleb Yoder (USA)

2014: Jennifer Rey and Luis Tapia (Chile); Eliana Tejedor (Colombia); María Helena López (Colombia)

2015: Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer (USA); Delicia Bravo and Peter Wigginton (USA)

2016: Gloria Showalter (USA)

2019: Maria Helena López (Colombia)

2020: Jaden Hostetter (USA)

In addition, Mission Network's 2016, 2017 and 2018 Journey International teams and Mennonite Central Committee workers in the Quito Church *Proyecto para Personas Refugiadas y en Movilidad Humana* have shared in these ministries.

leaders will be steeped in Anabaptist understandings and will forge new paths, theologically. Ecuador and much of Anabaptism has a history written by people who in many cases do not look like or even think in the same ways as the new leaders today, yet the new leaders will now be the ones who will write the history and the future of this flourishing Anabaptist church.

The Indigenous church looks forward to new times, when they will have their own theological educational institutions to train their future leaders in this new identity that embraces the culture, the dress, the language, the food, the ancient traditions, and the love and defense of creation and that takes Jesus' revolutionary and saving message and

allows it to transform their ancient beliefs in amazing ways.

The Quito church hopes to see a culture of peace transcend through all its life, in all its programs and in all its ministries. This includes a Peace and Reconciliation Center that educates their current and future leaders, giving them tools to work towards peace in their different walks of life. They trust the Spirit to show how the church becomes a city on a hill, a lamp that will not be blown out, teaching peace to all of Quito and the Andean Region.

Anabaptists in Ecuador feel a shiver down their spines as they feel the gales blow in the entire Andean Region, as Anabaptists develop ties from Venezuela, to Peru, to Colombia, all through Ecuador, and beyond. As regional Andean gatherings grow and bonds are strengthened, the effects will be seen, like a condor, soaring on the wind currents.

God's Spirit has been at work in Ecuador; many, many years ago, seeds were planted before any missionaries ever set foot on this beautiful land. And we have no way of knowing where the winds blew those seeds and where they landed and where the breeze continues to take them. But we have faith that amazing things will continue to happen; we will continue to be surprised by God's work along the rivers in the Amazon, in the highlands, in the shadows of the snowcapped mountains, and alongside the crashing waves of the Ecuadorian coast. God is present; God is breathing; God is moving mountains; the Spirit is sustaining all; the Spirit goes where it wishes.

A final prayer

Oscar Herrera, long-term coordinator of the IMCOL Missions Committee, offered this prayer in 2014, which continues to be our prayer today: "We pray to our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that God may be glorified in the work of the Ecuador Partnership and bless the growth and consolidation of the Mennonite communities we accompany in our sister country of Ecuador. We pray that the wisdom of the Lord that comes from above, would come upon each of the members of the partnership and that the character of the Lord be reflected in every step and decision to be faced in the future. Amen."

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Thirty years ago, no one knew where the “winds of the Spirit” would take Mennonite involvement in Ecuador. What unexpected opportunities have you observed that have become possible because of being open to the Spirit?
2. For José Manuel Guamán, Luke 4:18 was a pivotal verse in his spiritual formation leading to his calling: “He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (NRSV). Is there a verse that has been pivotal for you in your calling?
3. Each of the partners in the Ecuador Partnership brought gifts to share, and through working together, the ministry has deepened and expanded. What are some of the gifts of each partner mentioned in the text? And how is your church or your ministry enhanced and made stronger through relationships with others who bring different gifts and experiences?
4. The church in Quito started a long-term refugee ministry by sharing their own possessions with refugees who arrived at the church, and then, gradually, the ministry grew and took shape. What differences do you see between ministries that start like this and ones that come about through an initial study and planning process?
5. When the new ICAME conference in Quito was able to purchase a building, Alba Silva said that the building would be God’s house for anyone who would like to come. She said, “Its purpose is to proclaim the kingdom of God through justice and peace.” How would you describe the purpose of your church building?
6. The Indigenous Anabaptist conference, ICME, chose to adopt the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective on the anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptisms in Switzerland. Why do you think it was important to them to acknowledge this history and register as an Anabaptist conference?
7. Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer and their family live half of the year in Ecuador and half of the year in the U.S., in a two-way mission model. What does this kind of mobility make possible?
8. Delicia Bravo shared her experience making diapers and diaper covers for her own babies in a way that resulted in healthier refugee babies, less disposable waste in the environment, and income generation for women. What experiences and skills do you have that might develop into something that makes a difference for others?

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*Available in Spanish.

The wind blows where it wishes: 30 years of walking in the Anabaptist faith in Ecuador

In March 2020, two anniversaries were celebrated in Ecuador. One anniversary marked 30 years of Mennonite Mission Network's presence in Ecuador. The other marked 20 years of the partnership formed for ministry in Ecuador, which includes Mission Network, *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (IMCOL—Colombia Mennonite Church), and Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC), an area conference of Mennonite Church USA. This booklet chronicles the story of these years of walking together and the unexpected and surprising ways that God's Spirit has moved.



Julián Guamán is Kichwa and Ecuadorian and is married to Elsa Yantalema. They have three children: Samy (vital energy), Kory (preciousness) and Ariruma (tree of peace). Guamán has studied theology and international studies in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Spain and has published book-style essays and articles on Protestantism, human rights, migration and Indigenous peoples. Guamán is secretary of *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita* (ICME) and currently conducts research on evangelicals, with a focus on Anabaptism in Ecuador.



Peter Wigginton is from the United States but lived in Argentina during some of his formative years. He is married to Delicia Bravo, who is Bolivian, and they have two daughters: Aliyah and Ariana. They have served as co-coordinators for the partnership in Ecuador since 2015 and also contribute in the church programs with their gifts in music, education, and children's and youth ministries. Wigginton has an MPA in Nonprofit Management and an MA in International Development and Peace Studies.



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