



# EXTENDING BEYOND

God's people from four continents joined hands to help *La Casa Grande* reach out to their community through an English camp last summer. Photo by James R. Krabill.

## Mission flows in many directions

A message from John F. Lapp, acting executive director

[Stanley W. Green is currently on a two-month sabbatical in which he is focusing on writing the history of Mennonite Mission Network.]



Many mission workers who have retired in the United States continue to relate to the ministries with which they worked closely during their international careers. Former workers can be very effective voices in North America for their former partners and for our fuller understanding of how God is working in the world. Some of them also write their memoirs, hoping to share the things they learned that could broaden the cultural horizons of their families, friends, and Mennonite communities. These activities are both a natural result of their great interest

in international service, and also a very concrete way to share mission insights with their “home” communities in North America.

Many of our current international workers and partners find ways to communicate with supporters in North America, not only to share what God is doing in those ministries, but also to engage us in thinking about how to better go about mission in our own neighborhoods. Both our workers, and increasingly our North American communities, are becoming more

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conscious of what we could call “two-way mission.” Mission has never been just “from the West to the rest,” but in a post-colonial world, Western Christians must be more  
*Continued on the back page.*

“God has moved into the neighborhood! God will wipe every tear from our eyes. God’s glory is the light by which nations will walk, and they’ll bring the gifts from their cultures into God’s dwelling place.”

—Revelation  
21:3-4 and 23-26,  
paraphrased



Photo by James R. Krabill

Diana Cruz (second from right) introduces the Youth Venture team to the *La Casa Grande* children.

# God hears children’s cries

When children cry, God pulls out all the stops and calls people from around the world to respond. *La Casa Grande* (The Big House) was born in 2000 as a partnership of churches in Benin with the Burgos Mennonite Church in Spain and Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. In 2018, South Americans joined God’s people from Africa, Europe and North America in providing this home for children who have nowhere else to go.

Diana Cruz and Felipe Preciado, a married couple from the Mennonite Church in Colombia, became part of *La Casa Grande*’s family last year. Diana teaches English and Spanish in the school that serves 32 children who live at the home, and more than 200 children from the broader community. This school permits God’s love, so evident within the walls of the children’s home, to have a wider reach. It also demonstrates the holistic nature of God’s care, as does Felipe’s work with agriculture and animal breeding projects.

## No orphans in God’s family

The founders of *La Casa Grande* did not create an “orphanage.” They insisted that there are no orphans in God’s family. God’s home is big enough for the whole extended family to find a place.

“We do everything on the basis of the love of Christ,”

said Paulin Bossou, one of *La Casa Grande*’s former directors. “We are trying to make sure the children can grow up in a Christian environment so that one day, they may also reflect the Lord’s love to others. We have the firm conviction that the world can change with the love of God.”

Though the Bossou family moved on to another

ministry a few months ago, *La Casa Grande* remains in competent hands. Bienvenu and Chimène Kadja, who have worked at the children’s home for years, have become co-directors. They have the dedicated support of people like Diana and Felipe, the West African house mothers, and a parade of volunteer “aunties and uncles” who come from around the globe to lend a hand.



Photo by Diana Cruz

Fiacre helps Felipe measure a plot in the garden at *La Casa Grande*.

## Wiping away tears

Fiacre also left *La Casa Grande* a few months ago. He came as an infant, who was HIV-positive. The disease had taken both of his parents. He and his house mother, Tanti Jolie, were inseparable. Though Fiacre was never strong, through Tanti Jolie's love and care, he lived to celebrate his eighth birthday.

Diana and Felipe only knew Fiacre for three months, but that's all the time it took for his death to leave a gaping hole in their hearts. Fiacre was Felipe's shadow.

"Every day he came to the garden to help me take care of plants, to measure the land for the flower beds, to carry stuff. He was always asking questions about the animals," Felipe said.

Saying good-bye to Fiacre was a sad time for the *La Casa Grande* community. And yet, his brothers and sisters found joy in describing to each other all the delicious food he would be eating in heaven. And there was some debate about how long it would take him to make the journey to heaven since it was so far away!

"There was a point when I could not stop crying," Diana said. "The children comforted me by saying, 'Don't

be sad; Fiacre is with Jesus now.' I should have been comforting them, but they were hugging me and reminding me of God's good plan for all of us. It still brings tears to my eyes. I hope to learn that kind of faith."

Fiacre and Tanti Jolie planted a mango tree in the middle of

*La Casa Grande's* pineapple field, because Fiacre loved mangos.

"The tree is a reminder that life goes on, but each person leaves their legacy behind," Diana and Felipe wrote in a prayer letter. "Even though Fiacre was a child, we will always remember him. Therefore, we wish to keep on working so that many more kids and adults get to know that they are cared for. We follow the example of our brothers and sisters at *La Casa Grande*." ■



Photo by James R. Krabill

Above: Fiacre at *La Casa Grande*. Below: Fiacre (left) and two other classmates doing schoolwork together.



Photo by James R. Krabill



## Meet our mission workers

**Diana Cruz and Felipe Preciado** arrived at *La Casa Grande* last year. Diana teaches English and Spanish; Felipe helps develop the experimental agriculture and animal breeding projects. They are sent by *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* and supported through a partnership that includes Mennonite Mission Network.



Photo courtesy of James K. Krabill

People from four countries—Benin, Colombia, Spain, and the United States—gathered together on the porch at *La Casa Grande* for singing and prayer during a Youth Venture service-learning experience in 2018.

## Mission flows in many directions

*Continued from page 1.*

conscious of what we have to learn from our fellow believers in other lands who have much to teach us.

Mennonite Mission Network has been promoting two-way mission for more than half a century, starting with Edwin and Irene Weaver, who took lessons learned in India to test a new mission-stance in West Africa. The Weavers often wondered who was the learner and who was the teacher as they studied the Bible with African believers. About the same time, mission workers in South America were moving off mission compounds to seek more culturally appropriate ways of engaging with communities around the good news of Jesus Christ. Willis Horst co-authored *Mission Without Conquest* recounting this endeavor.

In a ministry like *La Casa Grande* in Benin, West Africa, mission workers are coming from settings as diverse as secular Spain in Europe, urban Colombia in Latin America, and from various ethnic communities in the United States. They bring their unique cultural lessons to share with *La Casa Grande's* community. But, as Diana Cruz observes, mission workers learn much from Benin's culture and from the Beninese children they love so much.

With such a wide range of international “aunties and uncles” learning lessons in this context, the potential is not just for two-way mission, but for three- and four-way



Photo courtesy of Mennonite Church USA Archives

Mennonite Mission Network has been involved in multidirectional mission for more than a century, but the concept became more explicit when Edwin and Irene Weaver took lessons learned in India to test a new mission stance in West Africa in the 1960s.

mission—many people around the world will learn from these children as the mission workers share their stories with their sending communities. ■

John F. Lapp  
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Acting 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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