



# EXTENDING BEYOND

## We are better together

By Marisa Smucker, Executive Director



**M**ennonite Mission Network approaches mission by joining churches, communities and organizations upon invitation. We only go where we are invited by the people in

the local contexts and cultures. Through these invitations, we enter relationships with churches, communities and organizations around the world.

We value these relationships, because they enrich us by sharing stories that bring a deeper level of cross-cultural understanding that breaks down perceived barriers and stereotypes. Space is created for transformational experiences, and we are invited to become advocates for justice and to work toward peace. Above all, these relationships reflect, embody and spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Mission Network's partnership with *Comunidad de Instituciones Teológicas Anabautistas* (Community of Anabaptist

Theological Institutions, CITA) has Anabaptist conviction at its core. The Anabaptist conviction, or belief, that community is the center of our lives is central to this partnership. Jesus created a community when he walked on this earth. His community did everything together — eating, traveling, learning and serving.

In this newsletter, you'll read about the holy community that CITA representatives forged earlier this year. The conversations they shared centered around how to re-energize the church. Discussions like these are more profound and meaningful when held together with a community. Concepts can be challenged, new ideas brought up and old ones refined. When the church works collectively, we catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God on earth. ■

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At the CITA consultation in Mexico in February, Carlos Martínez-García, Rebeca González, Estefanía Martínez, Violeta Aiquejey Suastegui and Elizabeth Miller share ideas on follow-up strategies. Photo by Linda Shelly.

"But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together ... promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

— Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV)



Photo by Linda Shelly

Estefanía Martínez, from El Salvador, (second from right) shares her group's ideas about stories to write from Latin American Anabaptist history, while group members Santiago Espitia, Javier Márquez, Isdalia Ortiz Sanchez, Marco Güete and Violeta Aiquejay Suastegui observe.

**Strengthening bonds:**

# A gathering for Anabaptist theological education

By Jane Morrow



**E**nergized by a vision to enrich theological education in the Spanish language, 20 people, who are dedicated to nurturing Anabaptist principles within contemporary Christian thought, gathered in Mexico City, Mexico, Feb. 19-22.

Members of CITA met to evaluate and define their collective purpose, seeking strategies to address the evolving educational and formational needs within their churches and organizations.

The diverse membership of CITA reflects the richness of Anabaptist tradition across the Americas and Spain:

- *Academia de Liderazgo Misional Anabautista*, (Anabaptist Missional Leadership Academy, ALMA), USA.
- *Biblioteca Digital Anabautista* (Anabaptist Digital Library, BiDA).
- *Centro Bíblico Teológico* (Biblical Theological Center, CBT), Colombia.
- *Centro de Estudios Anabautistas-SEMILLA* (Center for Anabaptist Studies, CEA SEMILLA), Mexico.

- *Centro Teológico Koinonia* (Koinonia Theological Center, CTK), Spain.
- *Instituto Aquila y Priscila* (Aquila and Priscilla Institute), Mexico.
- *Red Menonita de Misión* (Mennonite Mission Network), USA.
- *Seminario Anabautista Latinoamericano* o (Latin American Anabaptist Seminary, SEMILLA), Guatemala.
- *Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano* (Hispanic Anabaptist Biblical Seminary, SeBAH), USA.
- *Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia* (Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia, SBMC).

“Although we are made up of small institutions, we make a great impact in our environments by offering quality education that responds to the realities of each of our countries. Although we are diverse, we maintain unity in the Spirit and, of course, in our theological and ecclesial principles,” said Isdalia Ortega Sánchez, SBMC board member.

During this gathering, multiple strategies were defined, with the expectation that teams would be formed for each strategy, to work toward CITA’s vision statement: “To energize the network of Anabaptist educational institutions for



Photo by Luz Stella Cortés

In an opening session, participants exercise cooperation, while learning to walk with their leg tied to someone else's leg. New avenues and commitment in cooperation emerged from the gathering.



Photo by Linda Shelly

Participants wrote prayer requests on paper flowers and folded them up. When the flowers were placed into a tub of water, they opened up. Participants selected a flower to take with them, in order to continue praying for one another after the gathering.

biblical-theological and ministerial formation for Christian mission in their contexts.”

Some of the strategies discussed included:

- **Developing** a database of professors who are prepared to teach at multiple institutions.
- **Expanding** the promotion of theological education opportunities in ways that are more likely to reach young people.
- **Revising and writing** materials for children, youth and adolescents.
- **Writing** the stories of more of the churches.

Rebeca Gonzalez, CITA executive co-coordinator, said,

“The in-person meeting helped us realize all the resources and gifts we possess together and that we can redirect CITA’s path toward a more intentional and closer collaboration among ourselves and as institutions. Each institution brings a special and very specific program, so, together, we can achieve a range of educational possibilities for the people of God.”

As CITA continues to evolve and expand its reach, its commitment to collaborative education remains unwavering. United by a shared vision, these institutions stand poised to impact Anabaptist-theological discourse and ministerial formation among Spanish-speakers around the world.

A charitable funding distribution to Mission Network from the Schowalter Foundation contributed to making the gathering feasible. ■



Photo by Eleazar Diaz Ortiz

Participants from 10 CITA member institutions gather in Mexico City, Mexico, Feb. 19-22, to share experiences and develop collaborative strategies for the future.

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## Mennonites unite in Ecuador's peace journey

Beginning in January, Mennonite Mission Network Ecuador Partnership Co-coordinator Peter Wigginton and Training and Resources Facilitator Mauricio Chenlo have been engaging in a transformative journey, alongside leaders from various Mennonite conferences across Ecuador, in a 12-module online course, titled *Pacificadores* (Peacemakers). Thanks to generous support from Mennonite Central Committee and Mission Network, those who completed the course were able to extend their collaborative efforts into an in-person workshop March 21-23 in Cumbayá, Quito, Ecuador. This workshop served as a platform to distill the wisdom garnered from the Peacemakers course and deliberate on how the congregations from different conferences could collectively champion peace-building initiatives within their respective communities.



Photo by Peter Wigginton

Karla Echeverría records ideas, as she, Patricia Albarca, Graciela Palma, Gerónimo Yantalema, Maryuri Cevallos, Silvia Guaman and Bayron Rivera brainstorm about proposals for peace initiatives in Ecuador.

## MTAL celebrates 20 years

Recognized by the Faith and Life Commission of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), *Movimiento de Mujeres Anabautistas Haciendo Teología desde América Latina* (MTAL, Movement of Anabaptist Women Doing Theology from Latin America) began after Latin American women felt inspired to begin their own movement by African women theologians at a 2003 MWC Assembly in Zimbabwe. At a regional gathering of MTAL in El Salvador, April 14-16, participants spent time in prayer, Bible study and reflection. They also celebrated how far they have come and blessed Cindy Alpizar in her new role as co-coordinator. ■



Above: Women attending the MTAL celebration hold a special *Missio Dei* published by Mission Network, titled *Women: 20 years of paving the way between dreams and hopes*, to highlight MTAL's history.

Right: MTAL co-coordinators Angela Opimi and Mary Cano present the 20th anniversary cake with Cindy Alpizar, who will be replacing Mary in a co-coordinator role in a planned transition.



Photos by Linda Shelly



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