

# Latin Anabaptists equip for missions

Forty leaders gather from 11 countries to represent 50,000 Anabaptists.



Mervin Charles (left) prays with Edwin Herdie Castillo (center) and two other participants at the Latin Missions Conference hosted by Amor Viviente in Honduras.

**F**orty church and mission leaders from 11 Latin American countries and several representatives from the United States gathered in Honduras April 16-25 for a regional conference on global missions.

This representative gathering for the 50,000-strong Anabaptist communities of Central and South America and the Caribbean stood on the back of earlier meetings of the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) of the Mennonite World Conference and the International Missions Association, a partnership of mission agencies networked with Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM).

Javier Soler, chair of the Amor Viviente missions department and member of the GMF steering committee, served as convener.

"The purpose of this gathering was to cultivate mission vision and encourage networking in the world harvest," Soler says.

In a meeting last fall, Soler and other mission leaders recognized the need for a gathering such as this to build mission capacity through additional organization, networking and financial planning that goes beyond "inspirational sermonizing."

**Citing the fact that 44,000 Latin American** missionaries have joined the evangelical missions movement, Soler says, "We also have workers from our Latin American Anabaptist churches who are serving abroad in North America, Europe, North Africa and Asia. Many are hoping to go to the world's least-evangelized regions."

Special speaker David W. Shenk, global consultant with EMM, taught from the book of Revelation, focusing on three questions: Why? The Lord has opened a door for Latin American Anabaptists that no one can shut (Revelation 3:7-13). Where? The church is the "horse" that will "carry" Jesus into unreached regions and within contexts of violence, hunger, death and natural

calamities (Revelation 5 and 6). How? The church is the "channel" that sends the river of life (the Holy Spirit) into the deserts and streets of our world (Revelation 22:1-5; Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Participants heard reports from conferences such as Amor Viviente and the Nicaraguan Mennonite Conference that are leading the way in international missions (Amor Viviente has missionaries serving in 10 countries. The Nicaragua conference has sent workers to Bangladesh and Thailand).

Willi Hugo, rector of SEMILLA, the Central American leadership training program, gave a presentation on the commitment of SEMILLA to help equip mission leaders from Latin America.

During a Bible study that clarified the "nations" of the Great Commission as "ethne," or ethnic groups, participants shared a renewed call to reaching the unreached ethnic groups within their borders. Some leaders from Venezuela, for example, said the Amazon people groups within their nation have never heard of Christ. Also, the K'ekchi' of Guatemala recalled a large unreached K'ekchi' community in neighboring Belize.

**The group also looked at Anabaptist** identity and broke into nine focus groups to discuss the 2006 Mennonite World Conference statement on core Anabaptist commitments.

Many of their churches have emerged in contexts of injustice, poverty and violence. Many are first-generation Christians. The Spanish culture, with its legacy of intimate interaction with Islam during the 800 years of Muslim dominance in Spain, can be excellent preparation for engagement with Muslim peoples.

Steve Shank, representative to Latin America for EMM, reports that each participating conference was encouraged to take steps in forming regional mission commissions to call and equip laborers for the world harvest.

About a dozen of the participants were young people already committed to global missions. They had come with their conference leaders to continue discernment about next steps for engagement in missions.

After the formal meetings, Amor Viviente invited the group on additional field trips.

"It went beyond discussion to vivid exposure to the ways Honduran Anabaptists are seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. ... The model of Jesus undergirded this whole event," Shank says.

Most national conferences represented at this conference had fraternal ties to EMM or Rosedale (Ohio) Mennonite Missions.—*Jewel Showalter of Eastern Mennonite Missions*

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—Steve Shank