



**Mennonite
World Conference**
A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**
Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d'Églises Anabaptistes

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January 6, 2014

To: Mennonite colleges, universities, seminaries, information centers, and local/regional historical societies.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of the Prince of Peace – the Savior of the world who makes all things new and gives us new beginnings through his ministry of reconciliation.

In this season of new beginnings, as we recall the journey that the wise men from the East took to Jerusalem, I want to call your attention to another journey that the Mennonite World Conference has been traveling toward reconciliation and hope.

As you know, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition was born nearly five centuries ago in the context of a painful church division – a division that included mutual condemnations and, in the case of many Anabaptists, the reality of imprisonment, torture and even execution. Even though our churches today have moved beyond these violent ways of relating to each other, memories of those conflicts have persisted in various forms. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession of Faith, for example, continues to “condemn” the Anabaptists; and some Anabaptist-Mennonites have kept alive a strong identity of themselves as a persecuted people.

In 2002—building on the work of earlier dialogues in France, Germany, and the United States—the Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference agreed to form an International Study Commission to review the theological differences that separated us in the 16th century and to explore possible paths toward reconciliation.

The Study Commission concluded that on several points—specifically our understandings of baptism, pacifism, and the Christian view of the state—important differences between our two churches still remain.

But the Study Commission also made remarkable progress in a journey towards reconciliation. At the heart of their work was an effort to retell the history of our beginnings—as Lutherans and Anabaptists—in such a way that both sides could affirm. That commitment to “right remembering” resulted in a new account of the sixteenth-century Reformation called *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*.

At a worship service of reconciliation, held on July 22, 2010 as part of the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, representatives of the LWF formally asked for forgiveness for the violence against the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century and “for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries” Representatives of MWC responded by offering forgiveness and acknowledging our own role in perpetuating memories of hostility.

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In response to the Lutheran action, MWC also made the following commitments:

1. We commit ourselves to promote interpretations of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story which take seriously the jointly described history found in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission report;
2. We commit ourselves to take care that your initiative for reconciliation is known and honored in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching about Lutherans.
3. We commit ourselves to continue with you in deliberation on the unresolved issues between our two traditions, in a spirit of mutual vulnerability and openness to the movement of the Spirit;
4. We commit ourselves to encourage our member churches, their local congregations, and their institutions to seek fuller relations and greater cooperation with Lutherans in service to the world.

Which brings us to the heart of our letter to you today.

As educators and historians, you play a crucial role in shaping the faith and identity of our global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. As you reflect on the ways in which you tell the story of Anabaptist history and relate to Lutherans in your setting today, we want to encourage you to take seriously this new reality in our relationship with the Lutheran church.

Here are four specific ways that you can do so:

- 1. Take time to read and to share with your faculty/colleagues the document Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ.** The document is easily available in English, Spanish and French on the MWC Faith and Life Commission website at: <http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/interchurch-dialogue>
- 2. Actively review the way in which you are currently representing Lutherans or the story of Anabaptist beginnings in your teaching.** Might there be some things that you need to revise in light of these new understandings and commitments?
- 3. Integrate this story of Mennonite-Lutheran reconciliation in your teaching.** In some ways, our history took a new turn in July, 2010 ... and this needs to become part of how we tell our story. (For a much fuller account of the reconciliation service—including the LWF Action and the Mennonite response—see: <http://www.lwf-assembly.org/experience/mennonite-action/>)
- 4. Consider inviting representatives of a local Lutheran church or school for public conversations about Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ.** Use this material as an opportunity for building bridges with the broader Christian church. One very helpful resource to assist in these conversations can be found at: http://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/four-session_StudyGuide2010.pdf

Thank you for your significant ministry within the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite community of churches, and the global body of Christ. And thank you for giving these suggestions your careful consideration in this New Year!

Blessings to you during this season of Epiphany,



Cesar Garcia



Alfred Neufeld



John Roth