



**Mennonite
World Conference**

A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**

Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**

Une Communauté
d'Eglises Anabaptistes

Missional Frontier: Kenya

Our goal is to share every year one missional frontier with the members of Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) and Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN). The idea is to inform, learn, and inspire about the work and challenges that Anabaptist churches and organizations are facing in a particular country.

Witnessing in Faith

Country context

Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC) is a conference registered in The Republic of Kenya. Kenya has a total land area of 581 309 km². Around 9.5% of this total land area is arable. The population is 48 million with a growth rate of 2.3%. Women constitute 52% while 75% of this population is below 30 years while 8 million are aged between 15 and 24 years. Life expectancy stands at 50 years. Kiswahili is the national language while English is the official language. There are 43 other ethnic and urban youth languages. Adult literacy rate stands at 78% with female rate at 42.7%.

Kenya is a secular state. However, Christianity remains the dominant religion with Protestants and Catholics constituting about 45% and 33% respectively. Islam is at 11%, while Indigenous at 9% and 2% being other minority faiths. The constitution K2010 guarantees full religious freedom. There are twenty-two unreached people groups (UPGs).

Economically, the country is an agricultural producer with light industries. Kenya is also a tourist industry. Nearly 50% of the population survives on less than \$1 per day while 40% of labour force is unemployed. Real GDP growth is 4-5% with inflation rate recording 5% as at January 2018.

KMC's history and mission structures

KMC traces her beginnings from Tanzania Mennonite Church (KMT). KMT inspired evangelists planted pioneer congregations in Kenya from 6 December 1942. Up till 1977 when the Conference was registered under Societies Act of Kenya, the KMT leadership oversaw the congregations. KMC exists to obey the great commandment (Matt 22:36-40) and commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The church envisions a holistic empowered dynamic and multiplying missional church that impacts God's shalom in a transformed world. In mission, we evangelize, disciple and equip individuals to witness a Christ centred peace and compassion within our families, across cultures and in public spaces. Our rallying call is "*Everybody is a missionary where is and everywhere*".

Structurally, the church has a hierarchical organization based on seven geographically defined dioceses. The overall authority of KMC is vested in the congregation of voting members at an Annual General Conference. Conference attendees are diocesan delegates, pastoral teams and lay program leaders. The church organs include: Mission Field Cell Fellowship (MFCF), Congregation, Local and Diocesan Church Councils. A National Executive Council (NEC) is the superior mission and administration organ that runs Conference affairs.



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Historical and ongoing mission challenges

KMC celebrates the contradictions manifest in most post-modern Christian church, periods of vibrant growth, stagnation, decline and renewal. The church has for decades recorded impressive growth with adherents once reported at 35 000 members. This exponential growth witnessed congregations being established beyond the traditional geographical rural regions of Nyanza. However, this growth encountered challenges which include:

Poverty and marginalization

Congregations are predominantly feminine and rural based with very high incidence of illiteracy, poverty and disease. Despite women membership constituting two thirds, patriarchal traditions continue to marginalize their access to leadership roles. Minority people groups such as refugees have also remained neglected. These fragile conditions diminish the church's capacity to adequately resource mission work.

Inadequate Anabaptist theological and leadership training

Historically, KMC blossomed under evangelist oriented dual leadership for mission and congregation. The place of theology, academics, structures and systems remain held in suspicion, doubt and contempt. The Pastor's congregational governance duties has diminished mission to a non-priority business.

Negative ethnicity, clannism and inequalities

Secular and church politics share a history of rewarding negative otherness, tribalism and clannism. These factors influence the way both the pews and the pulpit are populated. Congregations tend to emerge as alternate ethnic and clan social security formations with large populations of baptized but nominal and secularized Christians.

Changed environment of Idolatry and youth exodus

The working class and students have affinity for idols, self-gratification and instant answers to generational life challenges. This group despises the promise of faith and the "Jesus Kingdom". Instead they have embraced anti-intellectualism, syncretism, legalism and unmitigated human rights narratives. The resulting trend is dechristianization and exiting the church.

Inter-faith competition, conflict and violence

Kenya faces the dual challenge of, an aggressive spread of Islam and the threat of insecurity posed by Al-Shabaab Islamic extremists. The terror group trains and arm young Muslims to kill Christians and destroy churches. Evangelism and mission work, in predominantly Muslim regions, is a high-risk undertaking that few Christians would dare try.

A record of hope and fruit-bearing practices

KMC is celebrating several mission patterns by reaffirming mission as the core business of the church. The church established a mission agency styled KMC-SPAN Ministry (Sending Peace to All Nations). The church confesses that Jesus is the Peace for witnessing in the ever-violent mission context. SPAN undertakes planning and implementation of programs under the NEC's Secretariat. The renewal outcomes are both a product of faithful prayers and strategic visioning, planning and execution.



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The replicable approaches include:

Partnering for synergy and gift sharing in the Body of Christ:

KMC successfully established cross-cultural missions in Uganda and Kenya among the UPGs. Through own initiatives and partnerships, the church runs several unique community mission and inter-faith interventions.

Everybody is a missionary:

We exploit the job-seeking push and pull factors that drive the work and education migration trends as an opportunity. Members share the gospel and promote the establishment of pre-congregation MFCF in their new cross-culture locations.

Interfaith peace discipleship and contextualization:

Christian-Muslim relations is a priority for the church's mission. We conduct specially designed cross-culture, community and school focused mission ministries through Eastleigh Fellowship Centre (EFC) and Centre for Peace & Nationhood (CPN) initiatives in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods of Nairobi County. These mission programs promote coaching, discipleship and person to person witnessing through trainings, youth sports, business entrepreneurship, community wellness, school peace clubs, inter-faith dialogues, community health and nutrition.

Mapping, sending and relational building:

We respond to church planting as shared by missional surveys and contacts. Specifically, we take the gospel to UPG areas by directly sponsoring missionaries who to evangelize and plant churches in identified priority cross-culture communities.

Conclusion

In spite of the daunting challenges facing KMC, our confidence rests in the words of Apostle Paul (Philippians 4:13). As the church gets down to pray, we have prioritized two thematic areas for intervention. These are cross-culture entry and contextualized mission among Turkana County and South Sudanese. Secondly, Anabaptist leadership education for youth and women will equip and enhance their access to missional leadership roles for an integrated holistic ministry in a fast-changing world.

By Rev. Patrick J. Obonde (KMC-SPAN Missions)