

Information for Assembly Participants

Menonite World Conference • Paraguay 2009

This document provides practical tips for making your sojourn to Paraguay pleasant and memorable. While the focus here is on Paraguay (PY), these comments may be useful for other countries you might visit. The resources described at the end of this document give more information about Paraguay.



Paraguay
2009

Menonite
World
Conference

Assembly XV

Asunción, Paraguay
July 14-19, 2009
(Assembly Gathered)

“Come together
in the way
of Jesus Christ”

—Philippians 2: 1-11

Assembly Scattered
across Latin America and
the Caribbean before and
after Assembly Gathered

For registration information visit:
www.mwc-cmm.org

Meeting Site for Assembly Gathered

Assembly Gathered will meet in the Centro Familiar de Adoracion (CFA), a new mega-church on the east side of the city of Asuncion. Check out their website at www.cfa.org.py. The CFA street address is Del Maestro 3471, between Sargento Candido Silva and Doriano Gonzalez, near the major intersection of Av Mariscal Francisco Lopez and Av Madame Lynch.

The sanctuary seats 10,000 and the chapel seats 1,000. The twenty classrooms will be used primarily for workshops. An elevator is available, but there are plenty of stairs! Wheelchairs will be available for those who need them. While the CFA is large, it will still be compact for 6,000 people together for five days. We have therefore rented some recreational facilities just across the street from the CFA so that you can “spread out.” You are invited to bring recreational items such as soccer balls (football), volleyballs, frisbees, card games and table games. You can leave them as gifts when you leave the country.

Passports, Visas and Vaccinations

Consult your travel agent or tour group leader for the most current information regarding visas. Currently, western European countries do not need a visa for PY. Canadians and U.S. citizens do. Many Latin American citizens need only their national identity cards. See next section for Africa and Asia. Passports must be valid for at least six months beyond the date of your return. Do not apply for your PY visa sooner than 3 months before your arrival in PY. In your visa application form you will be asked for an address in Paraguay. You can use the MWC Asuncion office street address (not the mailing address) given on page 4 in the box entitled “Emergency Contact Information.

Just in case you lose your passport, bring along a photocopy of the identity pages

(usually pages 2 and 3) of your passport and a copy of your birth certificate. For those travelling to several countries, it may be useful to bring a few passport-type photos of yourself in case you need to make a last minute visa application.

Currently, PY does not require vaccinations for entry. But if you are travelling to other countries, those countries might. We recommend that you have an up-to-date Yellow Fever vaccination because the disease does exist in PY and perhaps in other countries you might visit. According to our PY medical advisors, malaria is not a problem in PY. But it may well be a problem in more tropical countries that you visit. Contact your doctor or local health clinic several months before departure concerning what you may need for your entire trip. Take along your itinerary and record of previous vaccinations in case you need a booster.

Some of you may want to visit the famous Iguazu Falls which can be seen from either the Brazilian side or Argentine side, but not from the Paraguayan side. For most travelers a visa is needed for Brazil. Less so for Argentina. But again, check with your travel agent to be sure. If you do leave PY to visit the Iguazu, you will need a multiple entry visa for PY to return to PY.

If your country has an embassy in Paraguay (or in neighboring Argentina, as is the case for Canadians), it wants you to register. This can usually be done electronically by visiting your government’s website or going directly to the website of your country’s embassy in Paraguay. You can also register upon arrival, but that is much more time-consuming.

Visas for those residing in countries without a Paraguayan Embassy

Paraguay has a small number of embassies around the world, with very few in Africa and Asia.

Obtaining a visa for PY when your country does not have a PY embassy will be a bit complicated. So, read carefully:

1. For members of General Council, Global Mission Fellowship or “delegates” to Global Youth Summit, the MWC office in Strasbourg, France, will give you instructions.
2. For those of you who are not part of these three groups, you will need to do the following: Send a photocopy of the identity pages of your passport, along with some additional information (as instructed separately), to MWC’s appointed travel agency in Asuncion, Canada Viajes. Email address: mwccvmts@gmail.com. Along with a letter of invitation (written by MWC in PY), your items will be taken to the PY Ministry of Foreign Affairs which will issue a formal letter of invitation which will be sent to you. With this letter you will be allowed to board your international flight and to clear immigration at the Asuncion international airport where an MWC representative will request your passport, take it to the Ministry who will stamp in the official visa. The passport will be returned to you. Upon arrival, be prepared to pay a service fee of USD 6. If the agent arranging your visa needed to send your documents by courier rather than electronically, be prepared to pay that cost also. As of March 2009 the PY government will not charge a visa fee for persons from Africa and Asia. If that policy changes, you will need to pay that cost.
3. In some countries, one person or office is coordinating visa procedures for **all** assembly-bound persons (for example, Tim Lind is

coordinating visas in Kinshasa, DR Congo.) In those cases, work directly with that person or office.

Insurance

You are responsible for your own accident, health and travel insurance. Check your insurer to see if you have coverage outside your home country. Travel insurance is available to cover charges related to cancellation or interruption due to injury, sickness, death or unforeseen circumstances for you, a traveling companion or a member of your immediate family. Insurance is also available for accident and sickness related medical expenses, medical evacuation, lost or delayed luggage, accidental death and emergency travel assistance. Travel insurance is available from your travel agent.

Air Travel Re-confirmation

After your initial departure from home, contact the airline of your ongoing or return flight to re-confirm your reservation at least 72 hours prior to departure. For any stopover of 24-72 hours, reconfirm your reservation as soon as you can. If you are with a tour group, your leader will take care of these details. For international flights, it is good to be at the airport at least two hours before departure. Some airports require a departure tax (usually about USD 30) if it is not already included in your ticket.

Money

The currency in Paraguay is called “Guarani,” which is also the name of a large indigenous group and one of PY’s two official languages (the other being Spanish, also known as Castellano). During the past several years the exchange rate has fluctuated between Gs. 4,000 and Gs. 6,000 to one US Dollar. In Feb 2009 the rate was Gs. 5,000 to one USD.

The Guarani is a “soft currency” which means it is essentially of no value outside Paraguay. Cash can be exchanged once you arrive in PY. Preferred cash is the US dollar or the Euro. Traveler’s checks and personal checks are not advisable. There are ATMs in banks, major shopping centres and hotels where debit cards and credit cards can be used to obtain local currency. Major stores and hotels also accept payment by credit card.

Weather, Clothing and Packing

July is the middle of winter in PY. Generally, it does not rain during the winter, but it can be overcast, dreary, windy and “drizzly.” It can also be pleasant and sunny. Temperatures can vary from 5 to 24 degrees Celsius (40-75 F) and temperature changes can be surprisingly rapid. Many buildings are not heated so, sitting quietly and sleeping can be chilly experiences. Because of these fluctuations, we encourage you to dress like an onion – that is, in layers that can be removed or added as needed. For example, rather than one big parka, wear a shirt or blouse, a sweater and a jacket.

You will see a wide variety of clothing styles in PY and within the Mennonite communities, from dresses to slacks for women, and from informal shirts to ties and suits for men. *Pack as lightly as you can* especially if you are traveling beyond Assembly Gathered. Check with your travel agent for baggage size and weight regulations.

Packing Checklist

- Passport
- Photocopy of passport
- Health insurance card
- Ticket
- Birth certificate
- Vaccination card
- Cash
- Money pouch
- Camera/batteries
- Credit and/or debit card
- Mostly casual clothes
- Some formal clothes
- Sweater
- Light jacket
- Cap or hat
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Travel umbrella
- Small flashlight
- Alarm clock
- Small mirror
- Wash cloth
- Medications (anti-diarrhea, anti-malaria, aspirin, prescription)
- Insect repellent
- Toilet paper
- Bible
- Detergent
- Electrical outlet adapter
- Family pictures
- Gifts
- Bedding (for some dorms)

Bedding

Some of you will lodge at camps or retreat centers and some of these facilities do not have linens, blankets, pillows and towels. You will need to bring those items. A compact but warm sleeping bag is less bulky than blankets. A limited number of blankets will be available at cost for those who forget or did not know in advance. But don't forget on purpose! You can leave your blankets in PY and MWC will make sure they are given to good causes. You will be informed in your final billing whether or not you need to bring bedding. If you are still uncertain, contact Cynthia at CynthiaDuck@mwc-cmm.org.

Prescription medications

If you regularly take prescription medications, make sure you have enough to last during your trip. Keep them in their original prescription bottles and always in your carry-on luggage. If the medicines are liquid, be sure to follow security guidelines.

Electricity

Voltage throughout much of Latin America is 220. If you bring 110 volt appliances, bring a power converter and adaptor plugs. Some appliances can handle both voltages. Some electrical outlets in PY can take both the North America dual flat plugs and the dual round plugs.

International Communications

International phone calls can be made from most hotels. An internet café will be available at the CFA, as well as a phone for emergency calls. If you know the phone number of your hotel, leave that number with your family or friends in case of emergency. Note additional contact information below.

On Being "Street Smart"

Violent crime is not a major concern in PY but petty crime, particularly theft, is fairly common. Here are some tips to reduce the possibility of being robbed:

- Although you will most likely be seen as a tourist in any case, try to reduce looking like one. Don't wear a big camera around your

neck or study maps in full view on the street.

- Large open-air markets, like Mercado 4, are great cultural experiences but these are also places where "pick-pocketing" is common. Keep your valuables (purse, wallet, passport, phone) concealed as much as possible.
- Although some areas are safer than others, do not walk the streets alone, especially at night. Try to have a Paraguayan friend accompany you, or at least someone who speaks Spanish.
- Remove your assembly name tag when you are away from the CFA. But keep it with you since it has emergency information on the back and you need it to enter the CFA.
- Carry some toilet paper with you since not all public restrooms provide it. Throw toilet paper in the wastebasket provided, not the toilet.

Speaking in many tongues

Part of the richness of our international gathering is the diversity of languages, and one of the challenges is the interpretation (translation) needed to communicate well. This will require extra patience from everyone. English-speakers may be especially used to hearing in their own language, but this time they need to be prepared to use headsets. Spanish will be the platform language for plenary sessions. Workshops will be conducted in one or two languages, but not more than two.

Banners

Help make the sanctuary come alive by bringing a banner. It can portray something about your conference, your congregation, your organization, your small group, etc. These banners will be part of the opening processional at 17:00 hours on Tuesday, July 14, and then hung in the sanctuary for the rest of the week. Watch for further instructions about where to join the processional or where to bring your banner after you arrive. All banners should measure 2 meters by 1 meter (79 inches by 39.5 inches) and have loops or folds at one end (for hanging).

Global Church Village

The GCV is a vital part of Assembly Gathered. It will be as meaningful as the contributions you bring. The Village will be open every afternoon Wednesday to Saturday. Outside on the parking lot there

will be a hut for each continental region, plus one for Paraguay and one for the global church. Bring items that portray "life at home," your faith community, your country and culture – artifacts, pictures, food, clothing, stories, etc.

There will also be two performing areas for music, drama, dance, storytelling – whatever. A small area is nestled among the continental huts and a large area is inside the CFA (the chapel of 1,000 seats). You can sign up for a 30-minute performance slot after you arrive. Or, if you want a specific day and time, feel free to communicate with our office in Asuncion at asuncion@mwc-cmm.org.

A Great Gift Idea

Sonidos de la Tierra (Sounds of the Earth), a program initiated by the conductor of the Asuncion Municipal Orchestra, provides musical instruments and teachers in poor sections of Asuncion and small towns in Paraguay. The Mennonite seminary (CEMTA) is a part of this program. Musical instruments of all kinds (brass, string, woodwind), new, used, even in disrepair, are welcomed as donations. Visits to one of the *Sonidos de la Tierra* schools, located within the city garbage area, may be possible during the assembly. For further information, contact Arlo Kasper at akasper@bethelks.edu.

Expo Mission

This is the term we use for the "display tables" area. A limited number of tables will be available for institutions and organizations that want to promote their mission. Forms are available from our offices in Asuncion at asuncion@mwc-cmm.org and Kitchener, Canada, at kitchener@mwc-cmm.org. A fee of USD 40 is requested for organizations in North America and Europe and USD 20 for organizations in Asia, Africa, Central/South America and the Caribbean.

Assembly Scattered

Many of you have signed up for Assembly Scattered, particularly for Paraguay. You will receive instructions from the Assembly Scattered coordinators about your visits with your hosts. If you have questions, contact the MWC staff person in the Asuncion office at AsambleaDispersa@mw-cmm.org

Emergency Contact Information

You may leave the following phone number with family and friends for emergency use only: +595 21 602 335

Other contact information:

Email: asuncion@mw-cmm.org

Street address: Congreso Mundial Menonita

Calle Evacio Perenciollo 2150, Asuncion, Paraguay

Mailing address: Congreso Mundial Menonita

C.d.C. 166, Asuncion, Paraguay

Recommended Resources

- *Like a Mustard Seed: Mennonites in Paraguay*, by Edgar Stoesz, was published by Herald Press in 2008. Available from Bookshop at Pandora Press, 33 Kent Ave, Kitchener ON N2G 3R2 CANADA; phone 1-866-696-1678 or www.pandorapress.com
- *PARAGUAY: A Tour Guide, With Special Emphasis on the Mennonites*, by Erwin Boschmann, was published in 2008. Available from Faith and Life Bookstore, 724 N. Main St. Newton, KS 67114; phone: 316-283-2210; fax 316-283-7608; toll free 1-888-646-2210; info@faithandlifebookstore.com. Also at Bookshop at Pandora Press, 33 Kent Ave, Kitchener ON N2G 3R2 CANADA; phone 1-866-696-1678 or www.pandorapress.com
- *Jumping into Empty Space: A Reluctant Mennonite Businessman Serves in Paraguay's Presidential Cabinet* is the biography of Mennonite Ernst Bergen as told to author Phyllis Pellman Good. Also available in Spanish, titled *Un salto a lo desconocido. Lo que yo aprendi como ministro*, and in German, titled *Entwicklung, Macht und Korruption. Als Christ in der Regierung Paraguays*.
 - The English version, published in November 2008 by Good books, is available at P.O. Box 419, Intercourse PA 17534; phone 1-800-762-7171 or www.GoodBooks.com and Bookshop at Pandora Press 33 Kent Ave, Kitchener ON N2G 3R2 CANADA; phone 1-866-696-1678 or www.pandorapress.com.
 - The Spanish title was published in Asunción, Paraguay by Servi Libro i 2008 and the German title by Neufeld Verlag in Schwarzenfeld, Germany in 2009.
- The recent MCC Peace Office Newsletter issue titled "Paraguay: Immigrants, Citizens, Hosts" is available from SueGlick@mcc.org or phone 717-859-1151.
- *Ein Leib - viele Glieder: Die mennonitischen Gemeinden in Paraguay*, by Gerhard Ratzlaff, Paraguayan Mennonite historian, was originally published in Paraguay in 2001. An English translation by Jake Balzer entitled *One Body - Many Parts: The Mennonite Churches in Paraguay*, was published in 2008. Available from Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre online at mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre and from Bookshop at Pandora Press, 33 Kent Ave, Kitchener ON N2G 3R2 CANADA; phone 1-866-696-1678 or www.pandorapress.com.
- Other books and essays that may be found in libraries or from publishers include: *Culturas en Interacción: Una Antropología Vivida en el Chaco Paraguayo* por Wilmar Stahl, Editorial El Lector, Asunción 2007; *Indígenas del Chaco Central Paraguayo: Etnohistoria e Identidad Contemporánea*, publicado por ASCIM, Chaco Central Paraguayo, julio de 2005; "The Mennonite Presence in the Chaco from a Catholic Perspective," by Lucia Alfert in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, July 2002; *Garden in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco 1927-1997* by Edgar Stoesz and Muriel T. Stackley. Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1999; *Up From The Rubble* by Peter J. and Elfrieda Dyck, Herald Press, 1999; and *Strangers Become Neighbors: Mennonite and Indigenous Relations in the Paraguayan Chaco* by Calvin Redekop, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980.
- A 2008 DVD gives insights on Paraguay. Marvin Dück, who works at TV Chaqueño, a Christian TV channel in the Paraguayan Chaco, filmed a musical program held by the Enlhet community from Filadelfia, Chaco. Various churches and musical groups of the Enlhet, an indigenous people group from central Chaco, participated in the choreographies, songs and recitations. To order or request further information, contact Marcelino Bergen at marcebergen_72@hotmail.com.
- One of four segments in "PAX Service: An Alternative to War," a 30-minute DVD produced by Mennonite Media, tells the story of the construction of the Grand Chaco Highway linking Mennonite colonies in the Chaco with Asunción. Available for purchase from Mennonite Media at www.store.mennonmedia.org or by calling 1-800-999-3534.
- Read again the "Registration Information" document which is part of the Registration and Travel Form. "Techy" types of all ages can go surfing on Facebook (type in "I'm going to the Global Youth Summit in Paraguay") and YouTube (type in "Mennonite World Conference") to see what you can find.