

CONVENCIÓN EVANGÉLICA DE IGLESIAS PARAGUAYAS HERMANOS MENONITAS (CEIPHM)

(CONFERENCE OF PARAGUAYAN MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCHES)

Congregations: 48

Baptized members: 2,500 (estimate according to the MWC database)

After long discussions at the national parliament, the Paraguayan government authorized the immigration of the first Mennonite settlers in Paraguay. The arrival of the first Russian-Germanic Mennonite Brethren in Paraguay goes back to 1930. They settled in the Fernheim colony.

From 1935 on they began their missionary work among the First Nations groups that surrounded the Mennonite colonies in the central Chaco. The vision of evangelizing the eastern part of Paraguay began by sending young people to Buenos Aires to go to a Spanish bible school. At that time, Albert Enns and the couple Susana & Hans Wiens went to Bragado, Argentina. Then, the president of the Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS), E. Janzen officially invited Albert Enns to begin a ministry in Asunción. This started in 1955 with door to door evangelization and literature distribution. The first baptism took place in 1956 and the first church was established in 1958 in the neighborhood of the Clínicas Hospital.

For the pioneer period from 1955-1965 it is possible to mention several permanent and occasional missionaries. Albert Enns, accompanied by his wife from 1956 on, was one of the permanent missionaries. Hans Pankratz joined them during this period of time. And in 1961 the second permanent couple—Rudolf & Hilda Plett—was added. They devoted themselves to planting the second congregation in the neighborhood of Bernardino Caballero. In 1965 Hans & Susana Wiens came to Asunción to establish and organize the Asuncion Bible Institute (IBA) and the Albert Schweitzer School (CAS). By the end of 1965 there were four couples and three single missionaries working permanently in Asunción.

Except for one couple, all the missionaries came for a seven-year period and had been sent by the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren conference from the Paraguayan Chaco. The financial aid, however, came from BOMAS during the pioneer period.

The local administrative committee was formed by J.H. Franz, A. Enns, R. Plett and H. Wiens, who held regular meetings to plan and analyze the general progress of the ministry.

BOMAS' objective was to establish churches that would eventually establish their own conference, thus becoming a local strength to evangelize the country. From the very beginning everybody agreed that the churches should become autonomous in evangelization, administration and maintenance. In 1971 CEIPHM was organized. Currently there are 48 member churches in Asunción and the departments of Central, Cordillera, Caaguazú, San Pedro, Alto Paraná, Amambay, Boquerón, Paraguarí, Misiones and Ñeembucú.

December 2007

CONVENCIÓN EVANGÉLICA MENONITA PARAGUAYA (CONEMPAR)
(CONFERENCE OF PARAGUAYAN MENNONITE CHURCHES)

Congregations: 25 churches and 22 annexes (developing churches) with 27 ordained pastors.

Baptized members: 1,335 (regular attendance of 2,809 people)

Leadership: The leadership of the conference is in the hands of an executive committee which is elected every three years in an ordinary assembly. This committee is made up of the following representatives: The president, spiritual counselor, youth director, ladies director, director of evangelism and missions, financial director, director of Christian education, and recording secretary.

In 2007 the conference organized a training course for leaders and pastors, in which leaders from all the churches belonging to the conference participated. The course was called "Capacitación 222" based on 2 Timothy 2:2 "*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*"

This program will continue in 2008 with a strong emphasis on mentoring, which means that every pastor and leader will have a mentor who accompanies him/her in the process of putting the content of the course into practice.

Challenge: Our country is open to the Gospel. The great challenge is to train the leaders so they can assist and educate people in need giving them a strong foundation in their faith in Jesus Christ.

Alvin Neufeld, December 2007

EVANGELISCHE MENNONITISCHE BRUDERSCHAFT (EMB)
ASOCIACIÓN IGLESIA HERMANDAD EVANGÉLICA MENONITA DE FILADELFIA
(EVANGELICAL MENNONITE BROTHERHOOD)

Congregations: 1 mother church and 5 annexes

Membership: about 900 members

Our church was founded with 23 registered members in Fernheim, a Mennonite colony in center of the Paraguayan Chaco, on October 5, 1930. All the inhabitants of Fernheim, just like the members of the new church, had come as refugees from Russia.

At the beginning, the church did not have a church building, therefore the meetings took place at the houses of the members or in the classrooms of the village schools. The first church was built in a village in 1942. As time went by the membership grew and during the

50s the decision was made to build a larger church in Filadelfia, the center of the colony. The building was inaugurated in 1963.

Our church, along with other churches of the same colony, always participated in projects such as the evangelization of the First Nations people, the Mennonite Voluntary Service, the establishment of a radio station and others projects.

The church celebrates Sunday services. It has a Sunday school for children up to the sixth grade, youth meetings with many other activities for them, as well as Bible-study groups in the homes. Currently the church has 512 members.

Besides cooperating with other churches in the missionary field, the church started its own extended missionary work in 1989. A couple was sent to found churches in the suburban area of the country's capital city. Up to now 5 churches have been founded with approximately 400 members. Two of the churches are already being headed by Spanish-speaking pastors, while the others still have a pastor sent by the mother church. These five churches with Spanish-speaking members are considered annexes of the mother church. The relationship among these churches is very strong and they will soon be united as a conference.

Some challenges: How can spiritual and numeric growth in the mother church be promoted? How can we keep on founding churches in the area of Asunción, maintaining the strength of the mother church and helping new churches take over more responsibility for their own church?

Arnold Boschmann, December 2007

CONVENCIÓN EVANGÉLICA HERMANOS MENONITAS ENLHET (CONFERENCE OF ENLHET MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES)

Congregations: 7

Baptized members: about 2,000

The first contact between native Enlhet and white people took place in 1932. Both had very different cultures. Nevertheless, the white people began their missionary work among the Enlhet in 1935.

The first baptism in 1946 was a turning point for our culture. Seven men were baptized. Later, they were taught by the missionaries and became the first preachers among the Enlhet. In 1948 two of them went to a place known as "Km 145" to preach the gospel. The trip from Yalve Sanga to Km 145 lasted many days since they traveled in ox carts.

The missionary Dietrich Lepp known as *Jacoc Apyivy* (in Enlhet: big orphan) together with his informant Nito Acevedo translated the New Testament into our language *Enlhet Norte – Tasic Amyaa Enlhet Appayvam* in 1970. The New Testament was used in the worship services, courses for pastors, conferences, in the Bible school, the agricultural school, in the home-economics school, as well as in many private homes.

That same year the *Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet* was organized. This conference is made up of seven churches and has a membership of about 2000 people. All the pastors are ordained.

Currently, our churches have ordained pastors, evangelists and deacons. Besides, every church has a group of singers and choirs.

It is very important for us to maintain a good relationship with our German-speaking brethren. The missionary organization "Light to the Indians" has helped us a lot and still accompanies us at present. We hope this relationship continues in the future.

Juan Ramos and César Cabaña, December 2007

VEREINIGUNG DER MENNONITEN BRÜDER GEMEINDEN PARAGUAYS (VMBGP)

(CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES)

Congregations: 7

Baptized members: 1,826

The beginnings of the Immigrant Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay

In Paraguay there are seven immigrant Mennonite Brethren churches. Three are located in Fernheim and one each in Neuland, Friesland, Volendam and Asunción. Despite being a minority in the immigrant ecclesiastic Mennonite community, the Mennonite Brethren church has had considerable influence on the immigrant Mennonite community. It is characterized as a rigid ecclesiastical organization, as well as one with a strong missionary practice.

The Mennonite Brethren church originated in the Molotschna Colony in Russia on January 6, 1860. At that time the Mennonite colonies in Russia had had a period of great growth that brought with it a spiritual renewal which culminated in the founding of a new church: the Mennonite Brethren Church.

In 1930 a large group of Russian Mennonites migrated to Paraguay and established the first church in Fernheim. In 1937 the Mennonite Brethren church in Friesland was added, followed by the Volendam church in 1947 and the Neuland church in 1948. The Mennonite Brethren church in Blumental (Fernheim) was founded in 1960, while the one in Asunción in 1963.

Due to the events of World War II, which created a lot of insecurity and confusion among the immigrants, the Mennonite Brethren churches from Brazil and Paraguay set up an association in 1948 to resolve issues and questions that emerged. This association was strongly accompanied by the Mennonite Brethren Church Association of Canada and USA. Later, in 1951, Uruguay was also added.

Foundation of the Association

Because of the growing missionary work, the necessity of founding a Mennonite Brethren Church Association in Paraguay emerged. This association would facilitate the relationship between the Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren churches and the North American Mennonite Brethren Church Association, which supported many missionary projects. Thus, the Paraguayan MB conference was founded on July 2 and 3, 1961.

This new conference was characterized by its missionary spirit, as well as its clear objectives regarding its responsibility towards the churches. Many work groups were created stressing the importance of correct teaching in the churches. Youth work and Sunday-school

work were also strongly supported by the conference. In addition, a financial-aid fund was established for theology students, and a fraternal relationship with North American associations was maintained. These continued to support the local conference financially for a long time. Currently, they only give a symbolic contribution.

The conference changed its name to VEREINIGUNG DER MENNONITEN BRÜDER GEMEINDEN PARAGUAYS (VMBGP) in 1993. According to the regulations of the VMBGP its objectives are: To work and teach in Mennonite Brethren churches fomenting unity and Anabaptist consciousness; to fulfill the missionary mandate within the framework of the VMBGP and the local churches; to form an association that helps, encourages and mutually exhorts each other; and to be the base for the joint work with other church associations both inside and outside the country.

In 1998 the VMBGP merged with the *Asociación Caritativa de los Hermanos Menonitas del Paraguay* (Charitable Association of the Mennonite Brethren from Paraguay). Currently, the VMBGP has 1826 members.

Projects of the VMBGP

Missionary Projects: When the Mennonite Brethren church came from Russia to Paraguay, it brought a strong missionary spirit along. That is the reason why they began to work with the First Nations people in the Chaco. When the Mennonite Brethren conference was founded in 1961, it strongly supported the mission organization "Light to the Indians". From the 60s on many Mennonite Brethren churches (from Neuland, Friesland, Volendam and Filadelfia) began to do mission work among the national population. The conference supported them financially, but later on the churches were able to finance their own mission outreaches. In addition, the VMBGP supports and supervises many local churches in Asunción and other places in the eastern region of Paraguay.

In 1997 three strategies for the future of the missionary work were formulated: To work together with the *Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas* (CEIPHM), i.e. the Spanish-speaking MB churches; to establish new churches in populated areas; and to enter into world missions, reaching out to unreached people groups.

The VMBGP also has Educational and Community-Service Projects as well as projects that it shares with other denominations / organizations.

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VEREINIGUNG DER MENNONITENGEMEINDEN VON PARAGUAY
CONVENCIÓN DE LOS PASTORES DE LAS IGLESIAS MENNONITAS DEL
PARAGUAY (COPAIMPY)
(CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE CHURCHES)

Congregations: 20

Baptized members: about 7,300

The founding ceremony of the *Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden* took place in the Mennonite church of Filadelfia on January 10, 1967. During the nineteen years before the foundation of this conference, a mediating committee was the link between these churches

and at the same time managed its joint projects. The founding churches were Asunción, Volendam, Friesland, Neuland and Fernheim.

The petition of the churches in the Menno colony to become part of the conference was accepted and formalized on February 12, 1968. After decentralizing the church in Menno—which was first divided into *Nordmenno* (the northern part of the colony) and *Südmenno* (the southern part of the colony), and then subdivided into local churches—Menno currently has 15 congregations. Thus the conference currently consists of 20 churches with a total of 7300 members. Most of the churches are located in the three Chaco colonies. The conference, as well as every one of the member churches, professes the Apostolic Creed.

The conference is legally registered as *Convención de los Pastores de las Iglesias Menonitas del Paraguay – COPAIMPY* (Conference of Pastors from Mennonite Churches in Paraguay). The conference has a statute and internal guidelines that provide orientation for its work. All the conference churches are autonomous. Legally, the theological institute *Centro Evangélico Menonita de Teología Asunción – CEMTA* (Asunción Mennonite Evangelical Center for Theology) belongs to this conference, but in practice it is under the authority of the South American conference. In addition, the conference is one of the organizations responsible for the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay – UEP* (Evangelical University of Paraguay).

Challenges of the conference are: To promote and maintain a binding relationship among the associated churches; to keep the biblical Anabaptist confession and the resulting convictions of faith alive and up to date; to support local initiatives as a coordinating institution, where necessary to be proactive and coordinate and combine efforts in the area of missions, evangelism, education, literature etc.; and to maintain and establish relations with other conferences.

Organizing A15 in July 2009 is an additional challenge. This assembly is being planned along with seven other church conferences.

In the area of literature, it is the first time that this conference has published a hymnal, which is to be used from 2008 on. Up to now the Mennonite hymnal from 1965 was used.

Also, every second year there is a general assembly that deals with topics on counseling and theology.

The board of directors is made up of the main pastors from all the churches that belong to this conference. This board meets twice a year in ordinary sessions and supervises the financial interests of the conference.

Ferdinand Friesen, December 2007