Churches on the Margins:

*Anabaptist Polygenesis in Chile*

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I. Introduction

This investigation introduces readers to the various Mennonite church groups that have emerged at different places in Chile over the last couple of decades. We therefore describe this as a polygenesis of diverse Mennonite church initiatives that have arisen quite independently from each other, not unlike the original Anabaptist movement sprouting in multiple places at about the same time. While we do not claim an exhaustive treatment, we trust readers will get a representative picture of the history and ministries of these churches, the way they relate to one another within their social and ecclesial surroundings, as well as the challenges the young churches face.

What follows is a narrative history, rather than a formal academic history, based on informal conversations and personal observation as we accompanied these churches while on my (Titus’) sabbatical semester from Canadian Mennonite University in 2006, and also while on assignment with Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network U.S. for five weeks in 2009, and while both of us were on assignment again with Mennonite Church Canada Witness from January to June in 2013. Because of the relationship MC Canada and MC USA have developed with these Mennonite church groups, I (Titus) was called on to travel to Chile in order to introduce the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) administrators to them as MCC began offering relief funds following the major earthquake in 2010. Since most of these churches operate primarily as an oral people, we chose to engage the groups presented below conversationally rather than with a formal questionnaire.

The material presented here is derived from church conferences and the many church services we attended, from transcriptions of recorded conversations and from extensive interactions with them as we followed the invitation to accompany and resource these churches in matters of Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice. Frequently, this included visiting in homes, cafés or restaurants and sharing fellowship meals in churches. Occasionally our observations also reach back to earlier experiences in my (Titus’) seminary teaching ministry in Chile in 1989-94. We remain connected with some present seminary staff and former
colleagues and friends; this has helped to further contextualize within Chilean culture what we learned during our recent time with these churches.

As we present our findings, sometimes focusing on church group dynamics, sometimes focusing on personal testimony, some repetition is unavoidable. As we gathered information, we always took care to explain that we were doing a writing project and to ask whether we had leave to use what we had learned in our conversations. Invariably, we were given permission including that of the president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile (IEMCH), Daniel Delgado.

We trust that the publication of this narrative history of the Chilean Anabaptist-Mennonite “churches on the margins” – once it is translated into Spanish, of course – will strengthen their knowledge of themselves and of their sister churches, and that this improved knowledge may become a bridge for increased fellowship and collaboration between church groups. We are not painting these church groups as “perfect fellowships” but we are confident that the testimony emerging from this investigation will be an inspiration to all who read it.

In our opinion, it is paramount that this narrative about and of these churches be made available in Spanish translation to make it accessible to the protagonists of this story. We gratefully acknowledge the support from Mennonite Church Canada Witness as it made possible my (‘Titus’) travel and stay in Chile for four months in 2006 and our stay of nearly six months in 2013. My gratitude also goes to the Canadian Mennonite University that made a research grant available to me (‘Titus) for covering certain related expenses, plus another grant towards the translation of the manuscript. We are deeply grateful to the all the church groups and persons in Chile for their consistently generous hospitality as they received us in their congregations and homes. We much appreciate Tim Froese (Executive Minister, Witness) for giving this manuscript a friendly critical reading. Finally, thanks also to our daughter, Susanne Guenther Loewen, for her time spent editing and formatting this document.

All photos were taken by Karen unless otherwise indicated.
Southern Cone Mennonite Conference – Chile

Nestled in a lush valley surrounded by rolling hills in rural Chile, just south of the nation’s capital, Santiago, is a Salvation Army retreat centre called Angostura Complex. Here, “about one hundred [predominantly Spanish-speaking] Anabaptists from six Latin American countries” (Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil and Chile), gathered to get to know each other, to sing, worship, talk about their understandings of church and to exchange ideas. “They were joined by visitors from Central and North America and by the Mennonite World Conference [executive].”¹ This set the stage for the fifteenth Southern Cone Mennonite Church conference held from January 23-27, 2013. For the first time, this gathering was hosted by members of the relatively young Mennonite churches of the Santiago area known as the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Chile or IEMCH (the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile), who lavished their warm hospitality on attendees. This event brought together men, women, and youth; the Chilean participants worked together in the daily tasks of cooking, serving and cleaning, as well as in organizing and presiding over the program.

Each country’s participating churches had an active part at this gathering: either a devotional or a workshop. “On two evenings during the gathering, representatives from Argentina and Brazil played praise songs with Latin American rhythms and lyrics that [emphasized] the commitment to peace and justice. Mónica Parada and Carlos Gallardo, co-pastors of Iglesia Anabautista Menonita ‘Puerta del Rebaño’ (Anabaptist-Mennonite Church ‘Door of the Sheepfold’) in Concepción, Chile, reflected on making the commitment to a

Mennonite peace witness in their own faith communities and families.”

Robert J. Suderman (former MC Canada General Secretary), who has spent a number of years teaching and working in Latin America, presented on the overall topic, *Biblical Foundations of Shalom: Incarnating Now Glimpses of the Future*, developing the following three themes: “A Shalom church understands the nature of evil,” “A Shalom church understands the love of enemies,” and “Paul’s manifesto: the politics of the church.”

We talked to some of the veterans of the Argentine Mennonite Church, some of them active in their churches for about forty years (the Argentine Mennonite conference is around 100 years old). Their maturity was evident in their openness, their confident ecumenical spirit and their solid grasp of Anabaptist theology. Two Bolivian Mennonite young men from the German-speaking, conservative colonies were at their first such conference ever. It is hard to imagine what they must have been thinking as everyone belted out the songs, their hands raised high and bodies swaying to the music. But one of them was even clapping by the end of the week!

The last day was the highlight of an enriching week. After the listening committee reported and recommendations for the next conference in Bolivia were voiced, we had a Communion service where we gathered in circles and the wine and bread were passed around as people prayed and sang. The leaders of the hosting church announced that there would be a

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2  Elgueta, i-ii.

baptism at the pool; three people had requested baptism, one of whom was Chilean pastors Samuel and Graciela’s 14-year-old son, Andrés. Samuel, a member of the Chilean planning committee, chaired the sessions during the conference. Daniel Delgado, president of the IEMCH, gave a biblical reflection about the meaning of baptism and then each of the baptismal candidates was helped into the pool. They were so warmly received and hugged afterwards, it was a sight to behold, especially when Samuel baptized his own son, took him in his arms and then sent him to his mom who wrapped him in a towel and held him. That boy will have many people to accompany him on his Christian journey. Besides his serious commitment at a young age, he is a talented musician and dancer! One evening during the conference, the youth were in charge of a cultural evening including music and cultural dances from the various regions of Chile.
II. Origins and History

Local and Missionary Initiatives

Who are the Chilean Mennonites and how did their churches develop? Before Jorge Vallejos came to Canada as a Chilean refugee in the early 1970s, he was instrumental in starting several congregations in Chile that initially had the name *Iglesia Evangélica Misionera* (Evangelical Missionary Church). Jorge and Ruth Vallejos joined the Holyrood Mennonite church in Edmonton (Northwest Conference, later also part of MC Canada) and started the *Iglesia Hispana* (Spanish Church) to serve the needs of the Chileans who lived “in exile” in Edmonton, Alberta. Vallejos continued to plant churches in Canada while, at the same time, visiting the congregations in Chile periodically to counsel and accompany them. Because of his influence, there was increasing interest among these churches in official affiliation with Mennonites, so after Vallejos’ visit in February, 1981, together with Mennonite representative, Nancy Hostetler, the churches were recognized by the Northwest Conference and took on the name *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Chile* (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile). They also requested that Nancy and Keith Hostetler be sent to Chile by Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) to train leaders and teach Bible.

The Hostetlers went to Chile in 1983 and were joined in 1984 by Donald and Marilyn Brenneman. When new leaders took over in Chile in 1984, “it became obvious that theological perspectives and practices and the vision of the leaders of the group were incompatible with the Mennonite Church and MBM. In 1985, following extended deliberation with the group, official relationships were terminated.

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Mennonite Board of Missions continued to send missionaries to Chile for church planting and related ministries. Following the 1985 earthquake, MBM and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worked cooperatively in relief and reconstruction ministries. Similar assistance took place after the 2010 earthquake.\(^5\)

Notwithstanding this recent beginning of Mennonite church groups in this country, there is historical memory of “a North American Mennonite [working] in Chile (1896),” who did not found a church of his denomination but instead rendered valuable pioneering groundwork for other Evangelical church families, most notably the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church and the Baptist Church in Chile. Thus Justice Anderson notes in, *An Evangelical Saga: Baptists and Their Precursors in Latin America* (2005, p. 73): “The Baptist pioneer, W.D.T. MacDonald, was first a missionary of the Alliance. All evangelicals in Chile, especially the Baptists, owe a debt of gratitude to the noble Mennonite, Henry Weiss. He should rank high as an intentional pioneer.”\(^6\)

**Further Developments**

MBM sent us (Titus and Karen Loewen Guenther) to Chile in 1989, to work as teachers at the *Comunidad Teológica Evangélica (CTE)* or Evangelical Theological Community, an inter-Protestant seminary based in Santiago and with an affiliate in Concepción. My (Titus’) assignment was to teach church history courses eighty percent of my time and the rest of the time to be open to relating to the leaders of the

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Evangelical Mennonite Church there. There was not a lot of interest in the relationship at that time. However, Carlos Gallardo and Mónica Parada from Concepción, upon taking a course from me (Titus) on the Radical Reformation, learned about Anabaptist ecclesiology and suddenly felt a strong kinship between their own understanding of the life of the church and the historic vision of the Anabaptists.

Most of the Chilean Mennonite church groups, some about twenty-five years old, grew out of a Pentecostal background. One congregation, Iglesia Anabautista Menonita ‘Puerta del Rebaño’ (Anabaptist-Mennonite Church ‘Door of the Sheepfold’; La Puerta from here on), arose in the context of the university community in Concepción. La Puerta is led by Carlos and Mónica, two of my (Titus’) former seminary students. La Puerta developed its Anabaptist-Mennonite identity as a result of influence from visiting Mennonite teachers like John Driver, César Moya, Delbert and Frieda Erb and us. Further on we will illustrate with some examples from the life of this church how its identity has developed.

In 2006 when I (Titus) spent four months teaching at the seminary (CTE) as part of a sabbatical from Canadian Mennonite University, (with support also from MC Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network), contact with leaders of the Evangelical Mennonite Church brought about renewed interest in the wider Mennonite church. During this time, I also visited pastors in their homes and churches, occasionally preaching and teaching an adult Sunday school class at IEMCH in Santiago as well as at La Puerta in Concepción. I was also able to introduce and distribute some resources among these churches, which opened windows for them to the wider Mennonite world. They seemed very interested, for example, in one of the films about the history and life of the Mennonite settlements and their mission work in the Paraguayan Chaco. Students and pastors alike found illuminating that Anabaptist-Mennonites, if they are biblical, do not divide congregations into pastors/leaders versus laypeople; they do not separate the church’s mission work from the rest of what the church does.

The growing interest and enthusiasm in both seminary courses (on Missions and the Radical Reformation, respectively) inspired hope that these students would bring their knowledge back to their home
churches and hopefully nudge these churches toward a broader view of discipleship and mission. The movie, *The Radicals*, about the early Anabaptists during the Radical Reformation, also found an eager audience both among CTE students (many of whom were Mennonite) and in Mennonite church people.

The following comments from students in the CTE, which we have translated from Spanish, show how they were influenced by what they had learned about mission. Guillermo Hernández wrote:

“[John Howard] Yoder’s words about leadership [in *The Fullness of Christ*] require a new reading of God’s word, but with honesty and sincerity; it implies giving up positions of privilege within leadership which do not belong to me. In the history of the church this position [of privilege] has been shown to be extremely dangerous. It has caused abuse, exploitation, coercion, jealousy and manipulation. I feel challenged to change myself and to work for change in my community with more participation of all members. I want to commit myself to making room for all members to discover and exercise their gifts, and to help them search for and identify those gifts. I also want to relinquish certain positions in order to be ministered to by my brothers and sisters to whom God has given gifts.”

Sandra Guerrero wrote:

“I believe this course has helped me to redefine in a broader and more positive way the concept of mission. For a long time I have observed that there are certain areas in the church that are considered to be mission and others are not. Generally, the mission agencies contribute to further establish the incomplete view of mission as a central emphasis, without taking into account the church as a whole. On the other hand, the churches, when speaking of mission, treat it as something specialized and separate from the actions of the local church. This contributes to an erroneous and compartmentalized conceptualization. Mission is presented as an optional and special ministry within the church, a ministry reserved only for some members. It reduces the participation of those not directly involved [in mission] to prayer and economic support only. Today I grasp clearly that this way of viewing things distorts the biblical Christian concept of mission. The latter has a much broader
meaning, which encompasses all of the church’s work, all its ministries and all of its members.”

Some of the faculty also showed a keen interest in Anabaptist theology. Pedro Correa, Methodist pastor and then dean at the seminary’s main campus in Santiago, was grateful for *Selecciones Teológicas Anabautistas* (1985), the Spanish version of Walter Klaassen’s *Anabaptism in Outline* (1981), translated by Arnold Snyder, which he has used in his teaching. Pedro Seguel, then dean at the Concepción chapter of the Evangelical Theological Community (CTE) was using John Driver’s *Radical Faith: An Alternative History of the Christian Church* (Spanish, *La fe en la periferia de la historia*) as a textbook in his course at the CTE in 2006. A Baptist pastor, CTE Dean, and self-confessed Anabaptist, Pedro reminisces about a meeting with John Driver in his student days. He recalls approaching Driver with his deep theological questions as a student, addressing him with all the appropriate titles. “Just call me Juan,” Driver had said simply, as Pedro recalls. He is sure Driver had given him “profound answers” to his questions, but he does not remember these. What remains unforgettable for Pedro, and emblematic for what Anabaptism is about, is how this teacher modelled simplicity and equality.8

**Emerging Mennonite Churches**

“The winds of Anabaptism are blowing!”9 These enthusiastic words from Felipe Elgueta, member of the Chilean Anabaptist-Mennonite church, *La Puerta*, and seminary student at CTE, are an apt description of the dynamic life of emerging Mennonite churches in different regions of Chile. While most Mennonite churches in Latin America originated either by migration or mission, the Chilean Mennonite churches emerged as a result of congregations’ own initiative much like the Pentecostal churches of that country did throughout the 20th century. Jaime Prieto concluded his entry on Chile in *Mission and Migration*:

“Chile is an example of a country where Anabaptist initiatives have

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7 Pedro Correa has since become Bishop of the Methodist Church of Chile.
8 From a personal conversation between Titus and Pedro Seguel, Concepción, Chile, 2006.
developed and grown internally as Chileans have embraced Anabaptist faith and practice.”

How did Anabaptism take root in Chile? As mentioned earlier, some credit is due to Chilean-Canadian Jorge Vallejos, a Mennonite church planter and pastor who, in the 1980s, suggested to his Chilean church friends that they adopt the name “Mennonite.” Early on, Daniel Delgado, now president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile, was moved when he heard the story of Dirk Willems, a 16th-century Dutch Anabaptist martyr. He was also very impressed as he witnessed the holistic service of Mennonite Central Committee workers in neighbouring Bolivia, who showed no partiality with regard to religion, ethnicity, social class, or gender.

Since that time, the Evangelical Mennonite Church as well as La Puerta have received visitors, teachers and mission administrators from North America, neighbouring Argentina, and elsewhere over the years to continue and deepen the fellowship with the wider Mennonite church and to learn more about Anabaptist faith and practice. They have also become regular participants in Southern Cone Mennonite conferences over the last decade or so, and the ministerial and a number of youth leaders attended the fifteenth Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay in 2009. The group of churches known as the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile (IEMCH) became the one hundredth member to join the MWC in 2011.

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Larger Chilean Church Context

A look at the societal and church contexts, in which the Mennonite church initiatives in Chile find themselves, is in order here. Chile’s 2012 national census gives the following figures for the country’s denominational landscape: Catholics 67.38% (down 2.58% from the previous 69.96%) of the country’s total population of about 17 million; Evangelicals, including Protestants 16.62% (up 1.48% from the former 15.14%); non-believers 11.58% (up by 3.28% from 8.30%); other 4.42%.

Of the 16.62% Evangelical-Protestants some 80% belong to the Pentecostal movement that originated in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1909. Historically, Catholicism had the monopoly in most of Latin America until the time of independence in the early 1800s when Protestant educators found entry into the continent. The latter tended to connect mostly with the middle class. Thus it fell to the nascent Pentecostal movement to take the Gospel to the lower working class in society where it found an eager reception and spread vigorously; hence the relatively high percentage of the Pentecostal membership among Evangelical-Protestants in Chile.

Identity and Practices: The Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile

Insofar as the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile (IEMCH) congregations share the core beliefs and much of the worship style of the Pentecostals, they hardly stand out from their Pentecostal surroundings.

Moreover, their growth in Chile is not easy to measure, seeing that new members are gained and lost; also, as new congregations join the IEMCH conference, about as many sever ties and go their own way.

12 Statistic cited and discussed at the meeting of CREE – Comunidad de Reflexión y Spiritualidad Ecuménica, Santiago, Chile, February 15, 2013, which I (Titus) attended.
Nevertheless, as the MWC 2009 statistic on Anabaptist-Mennonites in Latin America reveals, total membership has more than quadrupled over the last 30 years or so – from 44,300 in 1978 to 169,364 in 2009 in 26 countries.\(^\text{13}\)

As mentioned already, the IEMCH Conference, with its estimated membership of roughly 1,000, has its ecclesial background in Chile’s Pentecostal movement. President Daniel Delgado freely admits that the Evangelical Mennonite conference shares its central beliefs with the Pentecostals. I am confident the leaders of the IEMCH would readily affirm the four theses of Pentecostal orthodoxy as distilled by Chilean Lutheran theologian, Manuel Ossa, namely: Christ is my Saviour; Christ baptizes his followers, giving them the Holy Spirit anew; Christ is Healer not of the soul alone but of the body also; and Christ is the King who is coming.\(^\text{14}\)

At the same time, Daniel feels there are significant emphases in the practical expression of their church’s vision that distinguish it from the Pentecostal parent church. But if we were to look for a well-articulated body of written “doctrine,” we would not find it. This “articulation” more readily takes the form of practical living. Here we could readily find lived examples of the following words written by Menno Simons in 1552:

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\text{It is not customary that an intelligent person clothes and cares for one part of his body and leaves the rest naked. The intelligent person is solicitous for all his members. Thus it should be with those who are the Lord’s church and body. All those born of God are called into one single body and are prepared by love to serve their neighbours.}\]

In our interaction we have witnessed many practical examples of this sort of holistic service among the needy in these churches. One of these is the effective rehabilitation ministry among drug addicts that seek


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 93 n. 8.
refuge in their congregations. Daniel introduced me to a family of four in which the husband “had been clean for three years” thanks to the church’s accompaniment; he pointed out another young family with the father being the only member of a soccer team to avoid the temptation of drugs by taking refuge in La Legua (Daniel and his wife Gladis’ congregation).

Where is their self-confessed Mennonite orientation grounded if not in written Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrines or statements? I witnessed Daniel sharing the iconic story of Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems with Aldo, a young visiting pastor from a sister congregation in San Juan, Argentina; “this story made my jaw drop,” Daniel confided to Aldo and me in a conversation over coffee in Santiago in 2006, which shows the importance of such stories from Anabaptist history.

The identity of the Chilean Evangelical Mennonite church is captured well in this brief anecdote from Daniel Delgado. When asked by a police officer, “What is your Mennonite church doing anyway?” He replied, “We are doing the work the police are hired to do, but we do it for free.” He has also said that although they carry many of the same core convictions as the Pentecostals (he named basically universal Christian beliefs), the Pentecostals, he says, are more inward focused. The Mennonite church, by comparison, is more outward looking and focused on service.

Their worship services are quite Pentecostal in flavour, however. Considerable time is spent singing *alabanzas* (praise songs) and praying aloud, often simultaneously as a whole congregation. Their Bible reading and interpretation is often literal and there is a heavy emphasis on personal healing and testimony; those seeking healing come to the front where leading members lay hands on them and pray over them.

According to Samuel Tripainao, general secretary of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile, the conference has some twelve congregations. They have four “departments” or organizations on the national level: pastors/leaders, women, youth and children. Aside from this, each congregation is fairly autonomous and organizes itself independently. Every year the IEMCH congregations in and around Santiago hold a joint youth retreat at a rented summer camp which
culminates in a baptismal celebration. Pastors/leaders’ and women’s retreats, as well as occasional marriage retreats are also part of their national programming. IEMCH also holds semi-annual conferences.

All the churches of the IEMCH minister in situations of chronic poverty. Their community outreach focuses on family, women’s and youth issues. Breakfast is provided for the children who come to Sunday school on Sunday mornings. It is common that the parents of up to sixty percent of those attending from the neighbourhood are “not Christian,” not church members. This is a way of bringing in new believers. There are some ministries that are dedicated especially to the children in marginal areas of the city. Often the children live with grandparents because their parents have addiction problems or are in prison. This is a children’s ministry which some congregations dedicate themselves to more than others.  

A vivid illustration of this ministry is a story told to us by Gladis Silva Vera (wife of Daniel Delgado). One day, Rabém, an abandoned youth, the child of alcoholic parents, showed up at their church. Gladis invited him into their home. Four years later, he still lives with them, and is now actively involved in the life and ministry of the church.

Juan Navarro, the pastor of the IEMCH congregation in Valdivia is heavily involved in prison ministry. He “found Christ during his eleven years in prison and during the many years since his release, he has continued [to return] to the prison to preach and minister to the people there…. He is a musician and his church became Mennonite because he had been invited to sing at an event in which Daniel Delgado was present. They met and he invited Daniel to visit his church. As they got to know each other, Daniel invited him to join the Mennonite

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16 From an interview with Samuel Tripainao, translated by Titus Guenther, Mennonite Church Canada office, Winnipeg, Manitoba, March 2010.
Navarro and others in the church would like to provide a place for prisoners to stay after they are released. He told us the prisoners are often released in the middle of the night and have nowhere to go, so the chances that they will re-offend and land up in prison again are extremely high.

In addition to their considerable social service work, the Mennonites in Chile show a keen awareness of the need to share the gospel with their neighbours. Samuel Tripainao, pastor of the former Peñaflor church and secretary of IEMCH, captures well the sentiment shared by most members of this group: “When we go out on the street, our witness is accompanied by a sandwich and a cup of coffee.” And their service is not limited to their immediate communities only. From time to time, pastors travel to more distant places, including across the Andes Mountains to neighbouring Argentina, to fellowship with and strengthen sister congregations and to lend a hand with local evangelism. When Samuel heard about the recent flare-up of the conflict over land ownership in the region where many Mapuche Aboriginal people live, he declared that “this would be a good place to start a church,” as an effort to bring peace and healing to this community. These Mennonite churches also demonstrated their care for the suffering sister churches in Lota (former coal mining town, about 500 kilometers south of Santiago) in the aftermath of the February 2010 powerful earthquake in Chile. Although of limited means themselves, these believers nevertheless loaded up three vans with supplies and delivered them to the people hardest hit by this natural disaster – not just Mennonites, but those from other neighbouring evangelical churches as well.

Women carry out the bulk of these churches’ many ministries – as much
as seventy percent of the workload, according to Samuel Tripainao and Daniel Delgado. They visit sister churches as far away as Temuco, Valdivia, and even Argentina and Uruguay, have evangelistic services as well as worship services in people’s homes, prepare food, organize fundraisers, visit the sick and those in prison, support families in need and walk alongside people with addictions. They essentially started the church in San Juan, Argentina after one of the families from the church in Santiago moved there. There is another group in Artigas, Uruguay, led by pastor Ricardo Díaz and wife Janette with which they maintain contact. The women’s groups have annual or semi-annual retreats, with guest speakers, both at the local and national levels. They do some Bible study, but “Their focus has been on prayer, worship and action.”19

As a result of wider church connections with other Southern Cone countries and Mennonite World Conference, however, women of the IEMCH (as well as women from La Puerta in Concepción) have become part of the network of the Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians movement (Mujeres Teólogas Anabautistas Latinoamericanas). Women of this group write Bible studies, articles and provide news on their website to connect Anabaptist-Mennonite women continent-wide. After gathering at the Southern Cone countries conference in Chile (January 2013), several Chilean Mennonite women leaders have attended consultations in Bolivia (2013) and Guatemala (2014). Gender roles continue to be an issue, however. The wives of leading pastors (all men) in the Evangelical Mennonite conference are called pastoras (female pastors) and “to a significant extent are recognized and function as pastors in their local settings, yet roles are distinct.”20 The term pastora essentially means “pastor’s wife.” This was still the case when we spent time there in 2013.

The biannual IEMCH conference, which we attended, took place in Santiago from March 9-10, 2013. All five churches of the greater Santiago area plus churches from the south – Temuco, Valdivia, Purranque, Frutillar and Talcahuano – were represented at the conference; the latter three congregations are interested in joining the IEMCH conference. After an opening devotional, the individual

20  Ibid.
congregations gave their reports. Many were quite similar: they mentioned how many people attend, the groups that meet (women, youth, children’s Sunday school with breakfast) and what their ministries are (visiting the sick, evangelistic campaigns, preaching in the street, helping those in need). Very few have any other kind of a format for their gathering than worship and singing alabanzas (praise songs). Several have prayer meetings and Peñaflor has a regular Bible study evening while others may have Bible study Sunday mornings. One participant commented that the reports didn’t contain enough content about how the people in the church are doing: their goals, problems, etc. Jorge Vallejos criticized the congregations for not having a strategy for attracting more people. He added that there hasn’t been much growth, either quantitatively or qualitatively. They should concentrate on leadership training and preaching the word. “If there is no Bible study, nothing is happening,” he said. One pastor was criticized by certain conference leaders for being absent too much because of his job. For those with small congregations, this is a dilemma; they cannot financially support the pastor, so he/she has to have another job. However, Samuel spoke up for that pastor, commenting that the pastor isn’t the only one who can do the work of the church.

The Temuco area churches in the south expressed their gratitude to the Santiago churches for their support through visits.

We talked with Jorge Vallejos about the volume of the music in these small church buildings. He said he has raised this issue with these churches, that they are potentially damaging their hearing, especially that of the young children. The texts of some of the songs are derived from Psalms or other Bible passages, but some have lyrics that may raise questions for the listeners, like Jesús es mi guerrero (Jesus is My Warrior). Someone asked us what our services are like, and we said that it’s important in our congregations that you can hear the person singing next to you.
The youth participate in evangelistic campaigns, vigils, retreats and interdenominational services. We heard they only invite Pentecostal churches to this, though, perhaps because these churches feel most familiar to them.

The financial report was interesting. It sounded like the conference has met its expenses to date, including those related to the Southern Cone Mennonite conference, although there are many needs in individual congregations, especially repairs or building projects and acquisitions of buildings as not all congregations own their worship venues. And they only ask for $1,000 pesos per month per member. That’s just over $2! They have some creative ways of raising money. *La Legua* church needed new chairs, so they asked all members who could to buy seven chairs. Often pastors will use money out of their own pockets to pay for things. *Lo Espejo* church made French fries a number of times to sell to raise money for people to attend the Southern Cone Mennonite conference.

After the devotional on Sunday morning during the biannual conference, I (Titus) was given twenty minutes to talk about the Anabaptist movement. This stretched out to an hour and a half because the younger generation had so many questions. Later, the various “departments” (*Las Dorcas* – the women’s organization – the youth and the pastors) met separately to discuss the past year and plans for the coming one. Sometimes the churches have a day they call an *operativo*, where they share their skills and gifts like cutting hair, sewing, and other things.

There was a good spirit of cooperation during these two days, although attendance was a bit spotty. Many more people came for the two evening worship services than were there in the day time. On the somewhat unfinished second floor of *La Legua*, the mother church, wonderful *almuerzos* (mid-day dinners) were prepared most efficiently, and people were very warm and served willingly.
Identity and Practices: La Puerta in Concepción

As mentioned earlier, the Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Concepción, La Puerta, had a different history. Initially, a Bible study group was started by Fine Arts professor Carlos Salazar of the University of Concepción. When he left for the United States, Carlos and Mónica became the pastoral leaders and maintained the integration of the arts in their worshipping community. They also encourage equal participation between men and women, although one does notice that the food preparation usually falls to the women, as is often also the case in the churches in North America.

In 2004, the Concepción church hosted a seminar on Anabaptism with guest speaker John Driver. Member Felipe Elgueta said that the group’s Anabaptist perspective frequently alienates them from other evangelical churches where it is difficult to find people with the necessary instruction and openness to sincerely seek the will of God through theological reflection. In his words, “...our practices and ideas...make us feel alone and misunderstood. We were very moved by the stories about those dissidents of the second to the sixteenth centuries, whom we see now as our predecessors, those who were also a misunderstood minority, many times pursued. We are also not alone in history.” Driver described La Puerta as “…a remarkably radical community that has gradually evolved from a variety of evangelical currents and influences.... They’re excited about the social alternatives the gospel implies. They see that the church can be a community and not a hierarchy.”

An example of how they incorporate the arts is retold here as I (Titus) experienced it during my sabbatical in 2006. As a unique way of preparing for an hour of prayer, the lively group of believers in La Puerta engaged in an hour of salsa dancing together every Wednesday night. These dance classes before prayer hour “began as a practical application of a sermon I gave in a Sunday service on the body and its importance,” explained dance

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teacher Valentina Elgueta when I spoke to her in 2006.

In Chile’s macho culture, spousal violence is all too common. Valentina and several other women from her church offered workshops for women’s groups in the community to improve their self-image and view of the body, as well as workshops on the kind of self-abuse alcoholism produces, especially for men. Valentina spoke of the theological underpinnings of her positive view of the body: as part of God’s creation, “the body is good and sacred” and “Christ’s resurrection” was of “the body” and therefore “a renewal in our faith journey is also renewal of our bodies.”

Although she began her dance classes by focusing on “taking consciousness of our body,” it was not an individualistic act. “Forming a circle and holding hands is important, because we are community. And it is not a matter only of learning a form of ‘self-help’ but of mutual healing by sensing each other in a different way, beyond words, [and sensing] that we are in the same boat. Besides, we need and are there for each other,” explained Valentina.

Why salsa dancing? “Because it is most expressive and playful... fun, upbeat and requires that we co-ordinate one with the other, that we touch and move in sync, and I thought it to be the best way of motivating not just the women...but also the men,” Valentina reasoned. Salsa dancing before prayer increased attendance at prayer, she observed, but even “more importantly, it reinforces the appreciation of the body... [as] good and sacred. So, why not [salsa dancing] before prayer, since we may see it as a moment of most intense communion with God? Dancing in community is an important time of communion with God,” concluded Valentina. The unique combination of dancing and prayer grew out of this church’s resistance to forcing young people to choose between cultural and church activities. By combining the two, the congregation created a lively and holistic atmosphere that encourages physical activity along
with spiritual exercise.  

Also in 2006, Tim Froese and I (Titus) attended an evening program by a group from *La Puerta* church which presented “Primavera a pesar de la Lluvia”: *Música para una tarde nublada*” (Spring in spite of Rain: Music for a Cloudy Afternoon). This included various combinations of diverse stringed and wind instruments and drums, poetry reading, and some singing. During this rich program, *sopaipillas* (fried pastries) were served with what some refer to as “*ponche canuto*” (Pentecostal punch or non-alcoholic beverages), though people of *La Puerta* do enjoy wine at meals in church.

On Sunday they had adult Sunday school at 10 a.m. and worship until 2 p.m., led by the youth group, including Communion, where I (Titus) was asked to contribute some words of “Anabaptist explanation” about its meaning. We spent the Sunday school class before the service in discussion of how they – and Christians more widely – understand the Lord’s Supper. *La Puerta* used flat bread and wine, with juice for children. People had the choice of drinking from a common cup or from individual glasses. They also have a communal lunch every Sunday after the service.

In March, 2013, we attended a worship service at *La Puerta* in Concepción with a group of about twenty people which meets in Carlos and Mónica’s former home. The music and sermon were thoughtful and solidly Anabaptist- oriented. Carlos’ Lenten reflection was based on 2 Corinthians 8:9 about the profound meaning of the incarnation: Jesus in his goodness making himself poor to live and walk among us and teach us the values of God’s kingdom by which the church operates in an often hostile world.

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Because of fundamental disagreements and disillusionment, what Carlos called, “fatigue with the Church,” he has withdrawn from his leadership of the regional Protestant (Evangelical) churches and ecumenical ministerials. He and Mónica are concentrating on the “faithful remnant” ministering to the small La Puerta Anabaptist-Mennonite congregation as well as the Baptist one in Chiguayante Carlos also pastors.

One afternoon we accompanied Carlos and Monica to their church service in nearby Chiguayante. The congregation had demolished their old and dilapidated church building in order to build a new one in the same place. At the time of our visit, they had just received legal authorization to start building and, in the meantime, they were holding their services in a school. The very personal prayers, usually about someone’s health, the simple texts of the songs and the frequent “améns” were similar to most of the evangelical churches here. The participation of women in this congregation, as in many other churches, was also evident.

One day of the weekend during our visit was designated a work day for La Puerta people. They were cleaning up, clearing branches around the building and getting dinner ready. A few boards on saw horses were arranged, tablecloths thrown over and about 15 of us shared a great meal.

La Puerta is also no stranger to social assistance work. As Shelly and Froese state in their report, “For many years the church has had an active ministry of retreats, including both separate retreats for men and for women, and marriage retreats. . . . The place they rented was destroyed in the earthquake of 2010. With the help of a loan, they managed to purchase a property that they feel will be ideal as a small retreat centre, but they face the challenge of [obtaining] resources for construction.”

Following the earthquake, Carlos and Mónica’s daughter Carla Gallardo, who is a family doctor, offered free medical consultations, and Carlos and Mónica gave considerable assistance with trauma counselling and

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helping people rebuild. Their own home suffered significant damage as well.

The various Anabaptist church groups named thus far arose some distance from each other, among people of different social and educational contexts. These differences made for difficulties in relating to each other. However, recent developments – including joint involvement in the staging of the 2013 Southern Cone Mennonite conference, have helped to significantly reduce the “distance” between the groups. Until recently, the Mennonites of Chile often felt isolated from the global Anabaptist movement, but such sentiments are starting to change through the visits of Mennonite Mission administrators and teachers from North America and neighbouring Latin American countries. Members’ participation in the biennial Southern Cone conferences and the 2009 Mennonite World Conference assembly has also significantly lessened these feelings of isolation. Recently, Linda Shelly observed on a visit that there was more openness for groups to relate to one another possibly because of my (Titus’) time there.

Carlos would be willing to explore together with the IEMCH what it means to be Anabaptist. They are aware of the cultural, social, and educational differences between the IEMCH and La Puerta and that it can be difficult in Chile to relate across these barriers. Linda suggested that it may be good to relate to each other in the context of the Southern Cone Mennonite Conference away from their own settings, and that a goal might be to have a fraternal relationship. But she felt that the relationship can hardly grow very significantly until both see it as being of mutual value. At the same time, Linda noted a growing openness between the groups toward each other.24 We found it noteworthy to hear Mónica Parada – co-pastor of La Puerta with her husband Carlos Gallardo – remark on how deeply she was touched by the wonderfully warm hospitality with which the participants from La Puerta were received by the IEMCH Southern Cone organizers and hosts on arrival at the conference in January, 2013.25 This is a hopeful sign of growing relationships between these church groups.

25 When Mónica traveled with three women from IEMCH to the Anabaptist Consultation in Guatemala a year later (Feb. 2014), Samuel Tripainao told me (Titus) that Mónica practically saved his wife Graciela’s life as she got quite ill from high altitude at the La Paz airport in Bolivia (telephone conversation, 2014).
Other Related Anabaptist Groups

A report on Mennonites in Chile would be incomplete without a reference at least to the Anabaptist impulses occurring within the sizeable Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile (UBACH) that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2008. According to then general secretary Freddy Paredes, this denomination has some 500 congregations and 35,000 baptized members, but weekly attendance is around 100,000. According to Paredes, they decided about 10 years ago to dissociate themselves from the Southern Baptist Convention (their US parent church) for two reasons: one, that the Southern Baptists had decided to disaffiliate from the World Baptist Alliance saying that they were too “liberal.” The Chileans were unhappy with that. The other reason he gave was that the Southern Baptists were becoming too “warlike” and these folks don’t want to go there. So they are in a search to recover their Anabaptist legacy (from the founding Scottish missionary) and want to move towards that as their primary identity. With reference to their beginnings, Robert Suderman, who attended the anniversary celebration learned “that the first Baptist churches were formed by Swedish colonists [in Chile], and the first union of Baptist churches was organized in 1908 near Temuco, Chile. [In recent years,] there has been a separation between the Southern [US] Baptist Convention and UBACH. One of the issues is the ministry of women in the churches. There are still Southern Baptist missionaries in Chile but they are working separately. Several Chilean Baptists attended the 2013 Southern Cone conference. UBACH is a member of the World Baptist Alliance from which the Southern [US] Baptists have withdrawn. Other US Baptist churches are establishing some relationships with UBACH.”

Omar Cortés Gaibur – a former worker in both the Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network U.S. programs, as well as a former Baptist seminary professor in Chile – has played a central role in this renewal movement within UBACH. Through his teaching on the Radical

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Reformation, Omar has helped the Baptist Church to rediscover its Peace Church roots. In 2008, UBACH and Mennonite Church Canada entered into a sister church relationship. After Mennonite Church Canada leaders Robert Suderman and Janet Plenert visited Chile and attended the 100th anniversary celebrations in 2008, Raquel Contreras Eddinger, then UBACH president, came to the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Winnipeg in July 2008 and talked about the vision of the leadership of the Baptist church. Before the end of her second term as president in 2010, she “noted some of the positive changes she ha[d] witnessed in UBACH: greater openness to working with other church traditions; reconciliation with the other Baptist denomination in Chile; greater respect for diversity within the Baptist churches; moving from ‘entertaining children’ to nurturing their faith; development of a [social network – after the earthquake response]; the ordination of women and the pastoral presence and testimony of Baptists for the 33 rescued trapped miners (2010) and their families. Externally, UBACH has also engaged the government, other NGO’s and the Mennonites more.” However, the Christian-Anabaptist Resource Center for Peace (Centro de Recursos Cristianos-Anabautistas por la Paz – CERCAPAZ), designed to help their congregations consciously embrace the peace church model, was discontinued after two years when the two staff people heading it left. Omar, the mastermind behind CERCAPAZ, has since joined the Anglicans in Chile. What will happen under UBACH’s new “conservative” leadership remains to be seen. When we spent a five-month term in Chile in 2013, we learned that the new administration doesn’t show the same enthusiasm in keeping this proactive peace theology program alive. However, we saw significant signs of the Anabaptist spirit continuing at work among some groups with Baptist roots. We met repeatedly with a newly formed church community from our neighbourhood, Comunidad.

Cristiana ‘Familia del Nazareno’ (‘Family of the Nazarene’ Christian Community), started and headed up by two Baptist seminary professors, Cristián Cabrera and Sung Young Yun (both former students of Omar’s). This group demonstrates that there is much vitality in this renewal movement. What are their services like? One Sunday morning in January they started their time together, as they usually do, with coffee and something to eat. They meet in the library of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Theological Seminary in Santiago. Jennesis Cayupi Rojas (Cristián’s wife), a theology student, led the service and Elías sang and played the guitar beautifully for some songs chosen by people in the group for their emphasis on values of God’s reign like forgiveness, social justice and compassion. People took turns reading the Scripture passages after which each person was invited to talk about something particular that motivated them as they entered the new year. We sat in groups of four and prayed for each other. Everyone took turns doing things with the children and they were integrated into the first part of the service before they left for their own activities.

During one meditation, Cristián Cabrera talked about Henri Nouwen’s book El Trabajo por la Paz (English, Peacework) in which the author categorizes this work under three themes: Prayer, Resistance and Community. We discussed Luke 11:1-13 focusing on the story about everyday basic realities like serving the needs of a friend or a child which illustrates the persistent habitual nature of prayer. There is a danger to spiritualize prayer, he said, but the down-to-earth illustrations show that God in his goodness gives us all that we could ask.

Sung Young Yun, in one of his Sunday morning reflections, confessed that he had difficulty putting together a meditation on the passage about the rich young ruler asking Jesus how he could obtain eternal life (Luke 18). Who among them is rich and has to be admonished to give what they have to the poor, he thought? Earlier, he had been thinking about the creation story and what it means to be created in God’s image. He noted that there was a conversation going on when God created humans. God said “Let us create a human being in our image.” Who was God talking to? He concluded that to be created in the image of God is to dialogue and communicate with others, to enter into the life of, or relationship with, the other. This is what happens in the stories in
Luke 18 and 19. Jesus converses with the rich young ruler about what it means to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. He asks the blind man what he can do for him. He tells Zacchaeus to come down from the tree so he can talk with him.

During a Lenten service, as participants were discussing a life of service, Valentina Elgueta (formerly of La Puerta) reflected on the challenge of giving up certain comforts in order to lead a life of service. During the potluck lunch, as people talked about how this group got started, a young couple, Miguel and Cati, said they both worked as engineers and didn’t find their work meaningful, because they worked with people for whom their job was all-consuming, so they quit their professions and now are studying theology with the two professors who spearheaded this group, and they are so excited to be part of this new movement. They had been searching for a church for a while and heard about the two professors’ families meeting in one of their homes, so they asked if they could join them. Since then, the group has grown to some twenty-five people including six children.

We were impressed by the commitment and sincerity of these people. They are conscientious about raising their children in an environment that fosters intergenerational participation and serious grappling with questions of faith in the context of a loving and supportive community.

In Valparaíso we visited a similar group, also Baptist, called Comunidad Cristiana ‘Nueva Esperanza’ (‘New Hope’ Christian Community) initially led by Luis Tapia and now led by Edgardo Montecinos (also former students of Omar’s), which had multi-generational involvement and which also tried to intentionally practice an Anabaptist understanding of the church. Someone from this group, made up primarily of women, said that this meant leaving the formerly hierarchical structure behind and allowing for the participation of everyone. These Baptist leaders credit Omar for instilling in them the Anabaptist vision.
Cristián Bustos (formerly the national youth leader with the Evangelical Mennonite Church), together with his wife Alejandra Torreblanca and other family members, started a community church and ministry to addicts in an impoverished outlying area or población of Santiago. The church is called Iglesia Cristiana ‘Príncipe de Paz’ (‘Prince of Peace’ Christian Church). The rehabilitation ministry project with addicts is two-faceted: one part is to provide food and remedial help with school work for destitute children, and the other is to provide a hot meal and spiritual nourishment for addicts from the street. He also envisions adding accommodation with sleeping quarters in time. At present about eighteen people with addiction problems come to the centre. The people from his church, Iglesia Cristiana ‘Príncipe de Paz,’ an independent ministry with about 25 participants, also help these people get personal documents so they can get health care and look for jobs.

Before embarking on this ministry, Cristián and Alejandra had been heavily involved in the Evangelical Mennonite conference (IEMCH), but Cristián had a falling out with the pastor of his congregation, partly over theology and partly over leadership issues. He claimed there was too much emphasis on having many worship services and not enough Bible study and social action. In 2010, he talked about service as a primary motivation in his ministry. “It’s something I learned from Jesus Christ who came to serve, not to be served. It’s something I love, to give all that I can [on] my part for people’s good, even if they aren’t friends or people I know. I think that doing all I can with my effort, my energy, my desire to serve... all those around me, my neighbours, is a way of honouring the Lord’s name. Today with the youth we have worked here in the plaza (park) behind our church. We have been able to care for the trees and pick up trash and broken glass, something that put in danger the children who play here...We can hear the commentaries of the people as we clean up. [They] see something different in us. They don’t see us as the same as the people who usually come to this plaza to get drunk, but they see that these youth have a different purpose.”

Cristián Bustos also spoke at that time of his vision to seek exchange opportunities for young adults such as with the International Visitor Exchange Program (IVEP), Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN), etc. He was concerned about young professionals leaving the church; they need educational opportunities. One thing the youth organization did was to raise funds for two trips, to Uruguay and Bolivia, to form a network of Mennonite young adults in the region. They also organized an annual youth camp or retreat and subsidized participation of the poorer rural churches.29

Cristián Bustos is one of the few leaders in the población who has studied theology and he was to become teacher and director of the Mennonite Bible Institute IEMCH had set up. This institute has not been active for a number of years. On our visit in 2013, he was very happy to receive some material for children as well as some other resources we gave him.

Cristián Bustos has written up a detailed proposal to present to the municipality to get recognition for the ministry to addicts as a community social project. He has achieved this with the help of a friend who works in religious affairs for the municipality. He feels the project is at the stage where it could really benefit from the help of a volunteer to work primarily with the children. Such a person could possibly come through Mennonite Church Canada, the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) practicum program, or some church from a neighbouring Latin American country like Paraguay or Bolivia. A volunteer should be conversant in Spanish, have some social work training and experience with children with behavioural problems. He emphasized that a volunteer should be clear about expectations. He or she should be aware that the project is new (it has been operating for about two years) and is still developing, and they are still learning many things.

Cristián Bustos recently wrote in an email that he is taking some courses, and is asking for recommendations of a book or resource on a systematic Anabaptist theology, as well as some material in Greek. He says the following about his studies and his community: “...in the

29 Ibid.
institute they all know, from the teachers to the students, that I follow the Anabaptist way and the members of ‘Prince of Peace’ know that this is the doctrine that we follow: service, the love for the neighbour, peace, the reconciliation and the community of gifts, and all together [walk] in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Kyrios.” He goes on to thank us for some material for children and says it’s been very useful for them in working with the children of the community. However, he writes, although they continue with the church and the ministry, they have not been able to find a larger venue to develop the ministry further. The present municipal government does not want to have anything to do with the churches; they are, in fact, closing many churches. He asks for prayers for the community.\footnote{Cristián Bustos, Personal emails to Tim Froese and Titus Guenther, Aug. 5 and 7, 2014. Translated by Karen Loewen Guenther.}

Two further church initiatives in the south of Chile should be mentioned. One, \textit{Nuevos Comienzos} (or \textit{New Beginnings}), was started thirteen years ago in Valdivia by three women – Wanda Sieber, Marlene Dorigoni and Waleska Villa – from the Argentine (Patagonia) Mennonite Church. They discovered “a hunger for Bible studies, both among people in churches and those not in churches. At first, university students and professionals, who had no interest in going to church, would respond positively to an opportunity to study the Bible. The Bible studies led to conversions and baptisms, and the realization that they needed a church. Together they decided to form an Anabaptist-Mennonite church. Marlene Dorigoni, whose roots are in Chile, noted that people of different social classes in Chile are generally divided and have little in common with each other. Yet the Bible speaks clearly of the Gospel being one, and being for everyone. Her gifts are in preparing Bible study materials and leading study and discipleship groups.”\footnote{Shelly and Froese, 2010.}

Linda Shelly and Tim Froese visited a group in San Pedro (a \textit{población} in Valdivia) where a group of women with very little formal education were studying the Bible together. Marlene Dorigoni explained, “The interesting thing about these two extremes is that both the people who come to the Bible study here and the people of San Pedro share the worship service together on Sunday with no difference in class,
which in Chile is a true miracle.” Worship services are carefully planned, according to Shelly and Froese, “as a time when everyone can worship God together. Songs are carefully chosen for the messages communicated in the words, and the worship band includes musicians from across the social spectrum.”\textsuperscript{32} In 2012, Wanda and Marlene felt the Spirit leading them to return to work in Argentina. During their brief absence, the group was led by Waleska Villa, one of the former participants in one of the Bible study-discipleship groups.

We attended a worship service there (on April 28, 2013) and noted that their style and emphases were similar to Anabaptist-Mennonite Church La Puerta in Concepción. Their songs, accompanied by acoustic guitar, as well as the biblical reflection emphasized the themes of compassion, service and peace.

From recent communication we learned that the first leaders no longer have ties to the Argentina Mennonite Church nor the Valdivia congregation because of theological differences, the main one being leadership: the Choele Choel church (in Patagonia, Argentina) did not approve of women pastoral leaders. Marlene Dorigoni and Wanda Sieber have returned to Chile however, and, along with Waleska Villa, are continuing their work with groups of women in San Pedro with various needs, including economic, literacy, etc. Marlene is also teaching and giving workshops in various churches in the area of biblical studies.

The other ministry, also in the Valdivia region, is led by Eastern Mennonite Mission workers Mike and Nancy Hostetter. Mike told us that during the early years of their time in Southern Chile (in the late 80s and early 90s), they worked with Youth with a Mission in hosting and training service teams, distributing Bibles as well as doing small health clinics on the islands south of Puerto Montt.\textsuperscript{33} During 1997-98, they partnered with two different churches: an independent church from Argentina, Rios de Vida (Rivers of Life), and one that is now affiliated with Calvary Chapel in California. They helped them start two sister churches in Puerto Montt.

Later the Hostetters took more of an interest in the work of Eastern

\textsuperscript{32} Shelly and Froesec, 2010.
\textsuperscript{33} Mike Hostetter, Personal interview by Titus Guenther, April 24, 2013.
Mennonite Mission (EMM), so in 2005 they began working for EMM. There are three more couples who form part of the EMM team on the island of Chiloé. Roger, a musician, works in the town of Castro in the area of music and worship and his wife, Noemí, teaches religion in the schools. Travis and Becky in Quemchi, a small town on the island of Chiloé, are working with children and doing Bible studies in a couple of homes. EMM sponsors another ministry on Tenglo, a small island across the bay from Puerto Montt. The leaders, Eliana and Ricardo, use counselling, art and music in their work with children who have been sexually abused. Dean and Christal, the newest EMM workers with the Hostetters, will be hosting groups of teens in youth evangelism service training. They’re also partnering with the church in Achao, which has a large boarding school population.

Mike and Nancy Hostetter are passionate about the concept of simple house-churches, also called organic church, and are working with a few groups. According to Mike, these are quite Anabaptist. “It’s the thing of dwelling in the Word where together you are around the Word of God, you’re going to the Bible as a body; you’re interpreting the Bible together. It’s not so much one person teaching as it’s together discovering what the Bible is saying to us as a community. It’s not so much leadership led or driven. There are leaders but we’re trying to get the leaders to be seen as facilitators and the focus is not on the leader…. We’re saying Jesus is the head, the Holy Spirit is present here. Let’s let the Word speak to us. Let’s be submitted to each other. Let’s try to live our lives transparent before one another. Everybody here believes in Jesus. That’s not the problem; it’s the problem of following [Jesus and] practicing the faith. How do we practice the faith? How do we live out daily our faith? What does it look like in the daily Monday through Friday?"34

34 From personal interview, April 24, 2013. Used with permission.
Mike is also part of a Christian businessmen’s ministry. He joined forces with someone there whose ministry was affiliated with the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship, which started in the United States in the 1950s. In time, they started a chapter in Puerto Montt and this grew to the point where there are groups throughout the country. But it’s not all positive, he says. “With the growth there’s also a lot of inner turmoil and the group has now split into three different entities and I’m in fellowship with all of them, with the leadership, because my role has always been sort of behind the scenes, supporting the leaders. So I purposely... try to work at bringing about restoration in the leadership... .”35 There are regional meetings every 3–4 months where Mike does some teaching. However, he admits he is a bit frustrated because the ministry is very evangelistic and growth driven. The emphasis is on personal testimony, so discipleship is lacking and many of the participants are not in church fellowship.

35 Ibid.
IV. Stories from the Life of the Churches

The stories that follow come from different groups and provide further insights into the lives of these people and churches as well as the dynamics of this movement.

Ministry to Addicts (February 2013)

One day we had lunch on the patio of the small church (Prince of Peace Christian Church) where Cristián and Alejandra Bustos and others interact with people from the street who are struggling with addictions. We sat beside a young couple both of whom were very thin and unkempt. Another older man kept standing up and reciting poetry: “Mi princesa, mi corazón, ¿por qué me dejaste solo aquí?” (My princess, my heart; why did you leave me here alone?), and more to that effect. He had lost his partner a few years ago; a few months after our visit, this man also passed away. We were saddened by what we witnessed. These people were so affectionate and so broken. We felt the stark contrast as we left our nice little apartment downtown to go to the poblanos, the poor areas on the outskirts of the city, with their many social problems. What a beacon of hope Prince of Peace represented in this setting!

Mother’s Day (May 2013)

We were invited to give a presentation on the Christian family in the Prince of Peace church. The small space, which doubles as the place where they prepare the food for people suffering from substance abuse during the week, was full and people were responsive and appreciative. Their Mother’s Day celebration after the evening service was rather elaborate. The men had prepared sandwiches, trays of cheese, olives, empanadas and cake. They gave each mother, including me (Karen) a bouquet of flowers. They brought in a television and while we ate, we watched pictures of church events. After it was all over, Cristián’s father, a taxi driver, took us to the end of the subway line and after an hour’s trip, we got back to our place again.
A Weekend in Peñaflor (February 2013)

We took the bus to Peñaflor, one of the poblaciones about an hour by metro and bus from downtown Santiago where we lived. Most of the Evangelical Mennonite churches are in these areas. Samuel Tripainao, the pastor, and his wife Graciela Soto with their four boys graciously provided a little room with a bed for us, which is a privilege given the crowded housing and lack of resources generally. We’ve known Samuel for quite a number of years; he was on the IMPaCT (pastoral exchange) program in Saskatchewan a few years ago and visited CMU Campus, MC Canada offices and our home as well. The room where we sat and visited was the kitchen/eating space, which was large but unfinished. Some panels were loosely stuck in the side wall and ceiling, which was partly open to the sky and subject to the wind. Our hosts joked about their ecological air conditioning. Five extra guests were there for one of the meals, and while we tried to talk, the neighbour was busy remodelling using a power saw which sounded like it was in the same room, due to the shared wall.

Some of the women of the small congregation and I (Karen) had a lively Bible study over coffee around the dining table. The Bible passage we looked at was Mark 5:25-34, about the woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and who touched Jesus’ cloak with the hope of being healed. We talked about the courage and faith of this woman given her lack of status. They had stories of their own struggles with health and the faith that has kept them going.

One of these stories came from Graciela whose oldest son started to have severe epileptic seizures when he was twelve. Over the next two years he had various types of treatments and only got worse. Eventually he had to have extensive brain surgery, which affected his speech, left one arm paralyzed and weakness in one leg. He’s eighteen now and is a seemingly contented young man with a very positive attitude. Graciela said she and Samuel could not have gone through the difficult hospital stays and slow recovery without their faith and support from their family and church community.

The other overnight guest in the household, Viviane Cárdenas, was one of my (Titus’) former students, who has her master’s degree in theology,
and who wanted to connect with the Mennonite church in Chile. She grew up in a church started by missionaries Charles and Mary Brown (Mennonite background) from the United Zion Church in the U.S. She realized after doing some studies at the seminary (where I, Titus, taught in the early 90s) that the Browns had been quite Anabaptist in their outlook.

I (Titus) spoke in the service on Sunday, where the three older boys together with their dad (the pastor) and uncle, Sergio Ponce, form the worship band. Nine-year-old Vicente is quite a talented drummer. The inventory of songs is similar in these congregations. Many are based on Scripture passages, especially the Psalms, while others are simply taken from internet sites. We have provided Samuel with some of the songs from the Mennonite World Conference Songbook and since he was at the MWC Assembly XV, he has learned some new songs.

When Linda and Tim visited in 2010, they observed that Samuel led the service with two books in hand: Life Together in the Spirit by John Driver and the Mennonite Minister’s Manual (both in Spanish). Since that time, Samuel has shared these resources with his father and brother (David) who started another congregation (more on that later).

We participated in a Sunday school session with children of the congregation and neighbourhood, and were encouraged to see that the Anabaptist Sunday school material was being used. Marcia and Cecilia, the two teachers, were capably cajoling some 15 kids (ages 4 to 11) to listen to the story, answer questions and sing songs with actions. It was an enthusiastic group.
We were wonderfully hosted and had a great time with this family. When they first started the church, he couldn’t find a job for a while and they had almost nothing.

Following are three stories of this ministry in Samuel’s words:

1. Beginnings

“This will be a bit of a personal testimony, how I (Samuel) felt called by God to start a congregation in Peñaflor. I was part of the church in a place called La Legua, where the president of the church [Daniel Delgado] is the pastor. A passage especially touched my life, the message from John’s gospel about the boy who gave all he had. That awakened a desire in me to serve the Lord. We had an urge to go to Peñaflor, which is somewhat out of the way. For three months we went back and forth and then we decided to move there. We had to rent a house. We were comfortable where we were, but we felt we needed to do this. They told us we would pastor the church there. It was a challenge. We had the desire but we didn’t have the means. But like this little boy who gave everything to Jesus, I felt that we also had to give everything. So I said to my wife, since we don’t have means, let’s get these means from our house. We decided to sell our television which was quite big and valuable. I suggested to my wife that we would offer this to the Lord. But she suggested we could sell anything except that television. But we decided we needed that money. I didn’t have work and the television was sold. It enabled us to rent a house and to live one month from that income.

“After a month, we needed to keep on living. We were willing to do something for the Lord but we didn’t have the means. The church that sent us did not have any means to help us out either; they only had money from a couple of offerings at the end of the month, but that was about it. But that was not enough. One morning when we woke up, the children were seven and four years old. She told me,
'This morning we have nothing.' She looked at me and asked, ‘So what do we do?’ I said, ‘Let’s pray.’ We sat at the table with the children. I asked the youngest, Andrés, who was four, to give thanks for the food. He said, ‘Dad, there is nothing.’ I said, ‘Just give thanks.’ He started praying. He gave thanks for the food. He had one eye closed and one open, because he saw nothing. He finished his prayer and an older woman appeared [at the door] with a bag of various items. This was probably one of the first miracles we experienced in our ministry.”

2. The church spreads

“Since then the Lord has never left us and we have travelled on this journey for eight years. And taken by his hand we have seen many things. We have seen two churches come out of this one, and it has really been quite marvellous. So we learned that you should give everything to the Lord. Through the testimonies and experiences we have had as a family, as a small congregation, the interest has awakened in other persons to also serve God. A very special case is that of my father.

“One of his sons, my older brother [David], was a drug addict. He was on drugs for nineteen years. He also had schizophrenia. So he was a problem at home. We prayed that God might restore his life. But we thought maybe it would have to be death that liberated him from his problem. He was often in danger of death in the streets and suddenly God performed a miracle. And this enabled another church to be born. The miracle was that my brother was completely restored, his mind, [and from] his addiction problem. We didn’t think that this would ever happen. But God is real. This allowed for my father, in gratitude, to open his home and convert it into a church. He moved all the furniture from the first to the second floor and converted the first floor into a meeting room. Now in February (2010), it will be a year since this step was taken. My brother, who has been clean for three years, is his assistant in this congregation. Many people have come as a result of knowing what happened to my brother, the change that took place in his life. That’s a church that’s closely tied to us. More than just a family connection, it’s that we have both seen God working this miracle.”
3. Persecution

“[The congregation in Peñaflor experienced] some persecution from our neighbours. They threw rocks at our church and the ones that hit the roof were big ones. We lived with this for several months. [The neighbours] also denounced us to the police. They took us to court and threatened us at our home. They [said they] would not stop until the church was removed from this community. The police came to investigate what was happening. I told them we hadn’t done anything; we were peaceable people. We even decided, out of respect for the community, to refrain from using our electronic instruments, so as not to provoke the neighbours. Even so, they rose up against us. The police were well aware of this persecution. They suggested the church should make a counter-accusation. I told them I couldn’t; I wasn’t about to pursue my justice but instead would wait for God’s justice.

“One day a summons to court came to the house. We had a denunciation for having built in a manner that was not permitted; it was too close to the street. This summons was very strange. The neighbours behind us were in agreement with the municipal inspectors. I went to talk to the judge and he was going to give me a discount. They were going to charge us $150. [He said,] ‘I’ll lower this to half but please pay up.’ I told him our church was poor and we didn’t have the money. We are renting, we pay the utilities, but we don’t have enough money. He said, ‘You’ll have to pay by going to jail.’ I said, yes, I was willing [to do that].

“The day came and the police came to pick me up; they took me prisoner and they took me to the police station. They asked me what my role was in this community. I said I was the pastor of this congregation and I live there. He asked, ‘Do you have the money to pay the fine?’ I said, ‘No, I don’t have it.’ ‘Then you’ll have to come with us.’ The sentence was to stay in jail for 15 days. During the day I would be free to go, but had to come back for the night. I was actually ready to do this. I thought it might be a good experience to share later on. If Paul had such an experience, why not us? God’s Word says, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice.’ They had decided to take me to prison. One of the police officers said, ‘You are a pastor? Don’t you have money? Pastors usually have money.’ I said, ‘Not all [pastors].’
“Enroute they realized there was a mistake in the name on the paper. I wouldn’t be admitted at the prison. I said there must be a mistake. He said, ‘I guess you’re in luck.’ I said, ‘I wanted to experience it.’ The officer didn’t understand. My name had been misspelled. It was not my real name. They decided to turn around and take me back to the house. At the house was my wife with some from the congregation. They were getting ready to call Daniel Delgado, president of the conference, to ask for some help. But it wasn’t necessary. When this was over, we never had problems with the neighbours again. We wanted to be a peace church that did not take justice into its own hands. We believe in justice and peace, and we have to put them into practice, although when the stones were being pelted at our roof, many wanted to go out and respond. It all turned out well, and the good part was that I didn’t get to know what it was like to go to jail. I actually had wanted to go. I thought perhaps there was someone in jail God wanted me to speak to.”

Anabaptist-Mennonite Identity (March and June 2013)

On our (Titus and Karen’s) first trip to Concepción, Carlos Gallardo, co-pastor of La Puerta with his wife Mónica Parada, took us to the little house they built beside the church which we had all to ourselves for the five nights we were there. We had coffee with Carlos and talked about the time when he and Mónica were at the seminary. “Studying theology” (at the CTE, the seminary where I, Titus, taught), he said, “is the best thing that has happened to us. It has given us the tools to interpret the Bible and think critically. We have learned how radical the teachings of Jesus are, which has prompted us to embrace Anabaptism.”

On our second visit, the La Puerta congregation in Concepción had requested a presentation on “Mennonite Migrations,” so on the Saturday of our visit, I (Titus) gave a presentation about the various migrations of Anabaptist-Mennonites and the distribution of Mennonites in various continents. The discussion following the presentation showed that they had a special interest in the historical dimension that gives these Mennonites their identity. A vital question, expressed by Mónica was: How do first-generation Mennonites connect with that identity or

37 Translated by Karen.
make it their own? Sunday morning I (Titus) preached on the meaning of Pentecost and in the afternoon gave my paper, at their request, on the place of Scripture among Anabaptists.

Dinners at the church consisted of delicious chicken and squash soup one day and meat turnovers the next. During the five days we were there, we were hosted by Nilza and her daughter Violeta, members of *La Puerta*.

After our time there, we took the bus back to Santiago with Lucy Riquelme and some of her paintings, which were part of an exhibition at the Mennonite Heritage Gallery in Winnipeg in September 2014. Sunday, Lucy accompanied us to “Family of the Nazarene” church, where I (Titus) gave the meditation. The following week, we went to the National Museum of Fine Arts with Lucy where she got the documents for the paintings so we could carry them to Winnipeg.

**Lucy’s Story**

The story of Lucy, a member of ‘*Puerta del Rebaño*’, illustrates the generous spirit of this congregation as well as Lucy’s own suffering, resilience and sense of hope. She tells it here with translation by me (Titus) and Felipe Elgueta, a friend and professional translator:

> “I came to the Anabaptist-Mennonite Church, ‘*Puerta del Rebaño*’ (Door of the Sheepfold), on January 19, 1997, in a truly extraordinary way. I was accompanying my cousin Nilza when she brought her daughter Violeta to her first youth retreat. Violeta was only 12 then and had never gone anywhere without her mom. I encouraged her, saying: ‘You have to start letting her go, and here she’ll be in the care of the best people, Carlos and Mónica. Do it now!’ The only thing was I didn’t know anyone and had never been there before. To make matters worse, I considered myself a completely agnostic person at the time.

> “The previous year, in September, I had experienced one of the greatest tragedies of my life: the separation from my husband. Separation is always painful no matter the circumstances. Also that year, in December – and in spite of everything – I managed to
complete my art studies. The following year, my daughter Gabriela started university studies.

“The lengthy interruption of my studies was due to the long military dictatorship in Chile. After Chile’s return to democratic rule, I took up my university studies again in order to complete my art program. But I had to provide every kind of conceivable document in order to demonstrate that I had not abandoned my previous studies because of academic problems but because of political problems. Finally, after a year of bureaucratic wrangling, I was able to reintegrate myself into academic life, one of my great aspirations. I was working and studying, and my marriage was going from bad to worse. But the separation at that time from my children Gabriela and Pablo, whom I love above everything (and this will never change), was the hardest part. I couldn’t take them with me because I couldn’t provide food and shelter for them.

“Did I come to the church with Nilza that day so that Violeta could go to her youth camp, or so that I could find the best of all refuges – God?

“Some people were living at the church. I thought: ‘It must be enjoyable to paint in a place that is also a church because there must be peace there.’ I talked to Carlos and Mónica about it. We reached an agreement and I moved in with my bed, canvas and paintbrushes to live at the church. This was one of the most heart-warming experiences of my life. In a very short time, I became integrated into the church’s activities. I almost didn’t notice my change from being an agnostic to a Christian believer.

“Besides being the co-pastors of La Puerta, Carlos and Mónica are my best friends and, together, we have lived through the different stages of our church’s life. It has not been an easy journey, but today we see that it has been worthwhile, that we are getting a closer glimpse of the light, and this fills us with joy.”

The Church in Lota (March 2013)

Lota, a former coal mining town near Concepción, has a sizable Mennonite congregation, part of the IEMCH conference. The mines were shut down there some time ago and the majority of people commute to Concepción to work. We were taken on a tour of the church because Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) money helped them fix up the part of the building damaged by the earthquake in 2010. This church was built by the 88-year-old pastor Roberto Sáez, who is still the presiding minister, but Boris Fuentealba, assistant to the pastor, is very interested in Anabaptism and is reading and passing on information to the congregation.

Boris was interested in hearing about my (Titus’) story, so in the service I talked about why the Mennonites migrated from Canada to Paraguay in 1927 and the work they do, especially with the aboriginals, as an expression of their faith. I expanded the model to talk about Anabaptist faith more generally. I (Karen) talked about our church in Winnipeg, specifically our way of getting to know each other better by meeting in small groups. As an example, I described one group that makes prayer shawls as a way of showing a person who is sick or is experiencing some difficulty that we are praying that God will cover them with his comfort and protection. During the prayers, a man came to the front to lay his hands on us in turn and prayed fervently for our family, our church and our work with the churches in Chile.

The painting in the front of the Lota church done by the youth caught
our attention. On a backdrop of a painting of a globe, they had painted the Chilean flag beside the Israeli one, because the Bible tells them they should pray for Israel also, they explained. But some in the congregation had asked why there should be only the Israeli and the Chilean flags up there. Should they not pray for all the countries in the world?

**Trauma Counselling (March 2013)**

A three-hour ride from Concepción brought us to the city of Talca, where we stayed with Elena Huegel, a Disciples of Christ church worker (and Eastern Mennonite University graduate in Conflict Transformation Studies). She was seconded to the Pentecostal Church of Chile (one of the larger Pentecostal bodies) to work at the Shalom Counselling Centre in work related to family violence and more recently, to trauma after the earthquake (2010). Part of Elena’s contribution is to train people to lead workshops in trauma recovery in their communities. The Centre is situated in the mountains, a two-hour drive from Talca. We had lunch at *Las Viejas Cochinas* (literally, “dirty old women”) restaurant, a famous place in the area. Apparently long ago it was called *Las Viejas Cocinas* (old kitchens), but someone misunderstood the name somewhere along the way. We ate together with the recently named director of the Shalom Centre, *pastora* Viviana, a Chilean Pentecostal. The centre is quite cutting edge for this society and especially for the church. They told us they work with many women but also boys and men who have been abused. Elena reported that seventy-five percent of Chileans have been abused in some way, the highest rate in Latin America, according to UNESCO.

I (Titus), on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada, helped connect Elena with MCC in 2010 after the earthquake to explore possible assistance, which the Shalom Centre subsequently received. Elena said the Disciples of Christ Church has a close affinity to Mennonites. She is clearly very knowledgeable about the church, politics and human rights issues.
Talking about Christian Values and the Family
(April 2013)

We were invited to pastors Gema and Elías’ place for a barbecue, and after an afternoon of visiting in the backyard, we went to their church (an IEMCH congregation on the outskirts of Santiago) to give our first presentation on “the Christian family.” We thought that after all the alabanzas (praise songs) and prayers, people would be tired and disinterested, but, on the contrary, they were attentive, commented on issues and asked for more input in future services.

We gave the same presentation, upon request, at two more churches, La Legua and El Pinar. The group at El Pinar was so small we could sit in a circle and converse. When we started talking about marriage preparation and relationships, Carlos Corvalán, the pastor, commented that in Chile the majority of young people live together without getting married, and he wondered how to raise that issue without driving people away from the church. Someone else mentioned that her daughter is in such a relationship and is not interested in getting married because of all the marriage break-ups she sees and also because she wants to maintain some degree of independence. Young women are more educated than their parents were, and they do not want to be stuck in a restrictive relationship in a society where machista (male chauvinist) attitudes are often still quite prevalent.

Members of each group made amusing comments about the Ephesians 5 passage about how women and men should act toward each other, until I (Titus) pointed out that men were to be the head of the household the way Christ is head of the church (cf. Mark 10:42-45), namely, as one who serves and is ready to give his life for his spouse. I also said that in Paul’s culture and time, women and children were considered property and had no voice, so this passage is revolutionary in that women and children are addressed as moral agents who can make decisions for themselves.
After an overnight 12-hour bus ride to Puerto Montt, we were picked up by Mike Hostetter and taken to the rambling wood frame German-style house, where he, his wife Nancy and their family have lived for 20 years. They have raised and home schooled their five children of which two (Christina, 15 and Victoria, 12) were still at home. We ate breakfast overlooking the bay, fishing boats and the lush forest of the island of Tenglo.

After lunch we crossed the bay to the island of Tenglo where Eliana and Ricardo work with children from this community – helping with homework and self-expression through play, clowning, puppets and music. Many of these children have experienced sexual abuse. Eastern Mennonite Missions, together with Mike and Nancy, has purchased this beautiful property on the Pacific, and one house has been built for the children’s activities and another where Eliana and Ricardo live. This Chilean couple is new to this ministry, but it seems like they are the only ones doing this kind of work in the area. The seriousness of this problem (especially on the island of Chiloé) has only recently been talked about publically. We mentioned that it would be good for the EMM workers to connect with Carlos and Mónica’s ministries in Concepción, as well as Elena Huegel and the Shalom Centre near Talca.

Upon Daniel Delgado’s request, we visited the following two churches, in Purranque and Frutillar (almost 1000 kilometres south of Santiago), which are considering membership in the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile.
Purranque, a Village Church (April 2013)

We were met at the bus stop on the highway near Purranque by a church member who delivered us to a little house behind the church – residence of the pastor, René Rivera and his family. Bernarda, his wife, had graciously prepared a meal for us while tending to their two-month-old boy, Edison. After we spent some time on our own exploring the little town, René returned from work and we talked about his work. Among the resources we left with him, he was especially interested in the Mennonite ministers’ manual (in Spanish). We were impressed by this family’s resourcefulness. Their cooking was done on a wood stove, which also heated the house and had a water tank connected to the stove pipe which provided the kitchen and bathroom with hot water all day. Bernarda was very tidy and concerned about doing her best by her children. The middle son (who was at his grandma’s for night to make room for us) is mentally challenged and they are looking for a school that would meet his needs.

After a light supper of bread, jam and coffee, we gave our “Christian Family” presentation at the church to about fifteen people. A couple of singers accompanied by acoustic guitars led the singing although they were apologetic they didn’t have their amplifiers, microphones and drums yet.

Miriam and Luis - Frutillar (April 2013)

We were warmly received at Pastor Luis and Miriam’s home, first by their two four-year-old granddaughters, Martina and Antonia (cousins), who were very eager to meet these foreigners. Miriam, the matriarch in every sense of the word, was warm, efficient and obviously keeps everything functioning smoothly. Later in the day as she and I talked in the kitchen over a cup of tea, she told me her heart-wrenching story.

She was born to a single mom and was raised by her aunt. When she was thirteen, she returned to her mom but was basically rejected and told she had to find work, because her mom had two small children at home. She found work as a domestic but was very vulnerable to men’s
advances, so she had to move from job to job. In desperation she married at sixteen, but the relationship did not last. In two subsequent relationships over the years, during which she had five children, she suffered repeated abuse. As her children got older, they tried to defend her, but when things did not improve, she finally left her partner and supported her children by working as a domestic, which she still does. She and Luis have been married for twelve years and she says he would never raise a hand against anyone. He has a very special relationship with his granddaughter who lives with them, along with her mother, Beatrice, Miriam’s daughter. Natalia, the youngest of Miriam’s daughters, is a soccer player and was playing in a tournament in Rancagua, about 1000 kilometres north of Frutillar close to Santiago.

Victor from Purranque, who was formerly a fellow prisoner with Luis, showed up for supper and stayed the night as well. He didn’t say much and seemed rather agitated, perhaps labouring under some trauma. Luis and Miriam were very gentle and respectful toward him.

In the evening we made our way to the small church – a house with the walls knocked out - that the group rents. The accordion player and guitarists were warming up and the women with the tambourines were taking their places. Miriam was called up by her husband a couple of times, once to say a pastoral prayer and another time to sing a duet with him in southern folk style. It was truly moving to see the two of them so competently leading this group. Although members had requested it, they are not used to the kind of “teaching” sermon I (Titus) delivered on Anabaptist distinctives (related to my own story). But they were very grateful for our presence, which somehow legitimized their existence as part of a larger body.
Prison Ministry by a Converted Prisoner (April 2013)

San Pedro, a población in the city of Valdivia, is home to the church (belonging to IEMCH) where we attended an evening service with 25-30 participants. Their choruses come from the Pentecostal hymnal, but were delivered in their own southern style of rhythm and singing accompanied by guitar, keyboard and flamboyant tambourine moves by the young girls of the congregation. After the many prayers, we were invited to give the message. We first told them about our respective Mennonite backgrounds (Canada & Paraguay) and then I (Titus) gave a meditation on Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4.

After the service, Juan Navarro, pastor, and another church leader told us about their new mission project, which is to build a room in the church to provide a half-way house for prisoners to stay when they first get out of prison. The prisoners are often released at midnight, and need a place to go. This pastor, formerly a prisoner himself, started doing informal chaplaincy work there on his own initiative and is well respected by the prison authorities.

Worship Music (May 2013)

While visiting at the home of Juvenal Díaz and his wife Alejandra Molina in the Santiago area, we passed on some hymns with music, since Juvenal, the worship band leader in La Legua (part of IEMCH) was interested in getting a small group together for me (Karen) to teach them to sing in harmony. We sang one of the hymns to demonstrate the various parts and while our hosts prepared coffee, we visited with their 10-year-old son Lucas and his friend Iván, both amazingly mature for their young years.

Youth Leaders (May 2013)

Fabián Díaz, the IEMCH national youth leader, invited us to join him and other youth leaders at church at about 2 p.m. in preparing and eating lunch (more like dinner, the big meal of the day) before having a seminar with them on leadership.
When we arrived at the church with Fabián, only Ángela and her 5-year-old son Lucas were there; no one could make it at that time because of work. The five of us went to a traditional Chilean restaurant where an abundant amount of meat was served on a rack with glowing coals underneath. Cecilia and her 10-year-old son Josué joined us later. It was close to 5 p.m. by the time the other four leaders arrived and we finally started our session. I (Karen) started with a mini English lesson on introducing ourselves to each other. They were enthusiastic and quick learners. I (Titus) led the seminar on the Anabaptist model of leadership. Just before 7 p.m., we went upstairs to have tea together with the youth who had their worship session in the evening.

**Sunday School (May 2013)**

When we got to the children’s Sunday school session at *La Legua* church, there were only 6 adults (with us) and 3 children having breakfast. Later, I (Karen) sat with Alejandra and her small class while they reviewed the Old Testament stories they had studied and the names of the disciples, their current topic. These 10-year-old boys showed a good grasp of the stories and might have been challenged a bit more. After this, I joined the adults for a unique lesson. The leader, who had studied in a Pentecostal institute, was talking about the Holy Spirit accompanied by charts projected on the screen about the steps to a spiritual life.

**A Women’s Meeting at El Pinar (May 2013)**

We managed to find our own way on the subway and by walking through the maze-like *población* streets (asking only once for directions) to a women’s meeting in one of the newest Mennonite churches of IEMCH, a former post office which was still in the process of being remodeled. The leader, María, had her own style of preparing everyone to let the spirit take hold of them in order to be ready for worship. This, along with loud singing and spontaneous praying, went on for quite a while after which someone offered a commentary on some verses in Second Timothy. We had some tea to offset the chilly temperature in the church before returning home.
Lecture at the CTE (May 2013)

I (Titus) was invited to give a lecture at the Evangelical Theological Community (CTE), the seminary where I was a teacher in the early 1990s. My topic was “El lugar de la Escritura: Una Mirada desde la Tradición Anabautista” (“The Role of Scripture as Seen from the Anabaptist Tradition”). The group of some 35 people: students, professors, pastors, engaged me in thoughtful questions about community and the implications of radical discipleship including conscientious objection. One former Mennonite student was there, but even though I had invited the IEMCH pastors, no one came. One reason may have been that some were working, but perhaps it was because they may feel uncomfortable in an academic setting. Eduardo Vidal, a former undergraduate student of mine and pastor of the Unión Cristiana Presbyterian Church, invited me to preach at their service on Pentecost Sunday which I did.

Retreat (May 2013)

“Christian Spirituality” was the theme chosen by the leaders of The Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile (Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Chile IEMCH) for a retreat on May 21st (a public holiday) in which I (Titus) was invited to present and lead a discussion. I talked about spiritual disciplines, spiritual health and Anabaptist-biblical spirituality as a way of life. The 20 to 25 people who attended were attentive and engaged. Samuel Tripainao, one of the pastors, commented: “Spirituality isn’t only being filled with the Spirit in an egotistical way. It is something different: it’s communal; it means being concerned about the neighbour. Spirituality isn’t only about going
to worship services and singing.”

When I (Titus) asked about the practical work the churches are engaged in, people talked about the voluntary service they do. Gema Huerta, a pastor together with her husband Elías Jara, takes care of an elderly neighbour with diabetes. Some congregations regularly bring food to the needy in the street as they witness to them. Carlos Corvalán said he would like his congregation (at El Pinar) to offer services like hairdressing, or a coffee shop in his neighbourhood, “because that is a good way to witness.” The young people of another church visit other young people to encourage them to be part of the church. The church in Valdivia in the south has a prison ministry. This is how these churches practice their Christian spirituality in visible ways.

Although individuals or congregations do good work, the conference as such does not have any organized service program. Many of the churches are in the middle of some of the roughest neighbourhoods in Santiago. There is a lot of theft, drug and alcohol abuse, grinding poverty, illness, and lack of education and skills. These urgent needs are so prevalent that responding to them comes “naturally” to these Christians as they attempt to follow the gospel.

**Women in Reflection (May 2013)**

About 15 women gathered for a retreat on Saturday, May 25th with Viviane Lara Cárdinas, Alejandra Molina, and me (Karen) as resource persons. Viviane (Titus’ former student at the CTE) started with the “dry bones” passage from Ezekiel and gave it a kind of new age feminist twist with a workshop that involved concentrating on feeling and movement in different parts of our bodies as a way of concentrating on both positive and negative emotions in order to affirm the life that God gave us.
Alejandra is the Chilean representative for the Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians organization called Mujeres Teólogas Anabautistas de América Latina, so she updated the group on what the organization is doing.

I (Karen) did a presentation called “Children and the Kingdom” (Los niños y el Reino), making use of the book edited by Daniel Schipani focusing on child development and showing how especially mental development in the moral/spiritual area can be taken into account for Christian education planning in the church and character formation in general. These women were eager to learn whatever they could, since they do not have much education and almost no one has had any exposure to formal courses on Christian education or theology. Even though the number was small, it was a good group and we had an enriching day together.

**The Last Tea (June 2013)**

We had tea at Daniel and Gladis’ and our last service at La Legua church before returning to Canada. I (Titus) preached on “reconciliation and unity” and we taught them the canon *Tú Eres Amor*, which they sang with great gusto: “Tú eres amor, Tú eres bondad, Señor da nos la Paz, Que el mundo no puede dar” (“You are love, You are Goodness, Lord give us the peace that the world cannot give”).

Before the service and still at their home, I (Titus) took the opportunity to ask Daniel some questions about the relationship between Mennonite Church Canada and the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile and about what distinguishes Mennonite belief and practice from that of other evangelical churches. Daniel said the sense of service and the commitment of the Anabaptists to risk everything including their lives for the sake of their faith have always impressed him. Also, he said, there is an international language among Mennonites because of the intercultural and communitarian nature of the Mennonite church in contrast to the more competitive and individual-congregation-centred Pentecostal churches. There is a community of support among the Mennonite churches.

We had talked earlier with Samuel about planning a meeting for all
the pastors (hopefully with the *pastoras* and a youth leader present also) to talk about our time in Chile, about what we have observed and whether they want longer term workers to come and accompany them. Sometime later Daniel said he and Samuel had had a conversation about the possibility of sending them long-term workers to accompany the churches. He noted they are open to interact with people from the outside, but he believes the congregations should remain as independent and self-directed as possible (effectively invoking the “three selves” from missiology): “*Deben auto-financiarse, auto-propagarse y auto-alimentarse.*” (They should be self-financing, self-propagating and self-nurturing). Workers would be welcome but they should have clear objectives about what they would be doing.

In a later conversation in February 2014 with Hippolyto T shimanga of Mennonite Church Canada Witness at an Anabaptist consultation in Guatemala, Daniel and Samuel had been very open to the idea of having someone from outside Chile accompany the IEMCH churches.

### Challenges

Despite their remarkable, multifaceted, and holistic ministries, the Mennonites of Chile at the same time face certain challenges, many of which are recognized by the IEMCH and *La Puerta* leaders themselves.

First, even though the present IEMCH as well as *La Puerta* pastors continue to show great dedication and leadership, there is a need to prepare new and younger people for leadership roles and to nurture them in biblical and Anabaptist theological teachings. At present, however, most young peoples’ preparation for future service in IEMCH is limited to helping in the ministry with children and youth. General Secretary Samuel Tripainao says, “[it] has been a challenge to identify ourselves more with justice and peace and to put all of this into practice. There is much to do in the Chilean churches. There is a lot of practicing of gifts, but we still have work to do to appropriate those convictions more.”

Second, the current pastoral leaders demonstrate a great deal of basic knowledge of the Bible. At the same time, the knowledge of biblical

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40 From an interview with Samuel, March 2010.
and theological interpretation and training needs strengthening among the leaders of IEMCH. Moreover, there is little evidence that the emerging generation has access to further formation in this regard. *La Legua* has a couple who studied at a Pentecostal Institute and *La Puerta* (Concepción) has one student enrolled in the theology program at the seminary (CTE) who also attended the seminary under the mentorship of theologian Fernando Enns at Amsterdam Free University for a couple of months.

Third, another challenge relates to the retention of members and individual congregations. It seems that almost as many members and congregations leave the IEMCH Conference as are gained. The leaders are concerned about the loss of their young adults who are educated professionals. Loss of members is not exclusive to the IEMCH though; *La Puerta* also faces the challenge of declining membership. While boasting some 60 participants in 2006, today the group consists of some 25 participants.

Fourth, there is the issue of gender equality, which continues to be a challenge for many of the congregations in the IEMCH, especially in the area of pastoral leadership (as mentioned above in the section on women’s ministries). This, however, is not unique to these churches. North American Mennonite churches also continue to deal with this challenge.

Fifth, some of the IEMCH churches have problems with the municipalities over the retention of property and how they may use it. One of the churches was close to being closed down, but now the leaders are involved in a long bureaucratic process to try to extend their stay, for some months at least, to give them time to find another suitable place. There are also problems with neighbours complaining about the volume, especially of the music, during the services.

Sixth, there is a need for further participation in the wider church, which could help to overcome their isolation – partly the result of geographical distance – and open up these churches to the larger Mennonite church family. There is a need for healthy, increased dialogue across the diverse groups of Mennonites in Chile. Hopefully, this would result in greater openness to other faith families as well.
VI. Conclusion

Nevertheless, the winds of Anabaptism continue to blow through the Mennonite churches of Chile. These Chilean believers are strengthened through the support of Mennonites from around the globe as they meet them at international conferences, and in turn the Chileans are opening other Mennonites’ eyes to what it means to be Anabaptist in their context. These encounters are wonderful opportunities for the sharing of diverse gifts that complement each other. The older Mennonite sister churches in the southern cone region and globally with a longer history of biblical-theological formation, can share their wisdom and experience, while the younger Chilean churches offer their brothers and sisters elsewhere the benefit of fresh insights derived from reading the Bible with new eyes.

This story of the life and ministries of these diverse Anabaptist-Mennonite church groups in Chile, which our study project narrates, speaks for itself and does not necessarily require a “conclusion,” save perhaps to underline some salient characteristics or dimensions we have found.

To observe the holistic way these congregations reach out, both materially and with the gospel, to their needy sisters and brothers and neighbours is indeed inspiring. Although most of the pastors receive no salaries and almost all church members are of modest means, they are courageous and creative in facing the multiple challenges of every day. The IEMCH congregations strengthen their conference network through regular pastors’, women’s, and youth meetings, and monthly “Confraternidades” (joint worship services of Santiago-area IEMCH congregations). These congregations, in their weekly street evangelism, are apt to engage the more dangerous parts of the city; Pastor Elías Jara recently survived a gunshot he received while his group conducted an open worship service in a neighbourhood with drug problems.
Furthermore, as was the case in the early church – and in renewal movements like the Anabaptists and other Free Churches – some of the Mennonite church groups in Chile freely transcend regional and national boundaries in order to share the Gospel in distant places (throughout Chile, in Argentina, Uruguay – not to mention Canada) and plant churches there.

We entitled our writing project “Churches on the Margins: Anabaptist Polygenesis in Chile.” After reading the above stories about the various Anabaptist-Mennonite church groups throughout Chile and beyond, the title can be seen as a fitting one. Readers may ask: In what way can these self-styled Anabaptist churches own this name? As we have seen throughout, these churches, particularly its leaders, confess to be inspired by the story of Anabaptism and by what they have learned about the Radical Reformation in seminary or by seeing Mennonite Service organizations in action. Can we apply a grid of “Anabaptist categories,” such as the Mennonite World Conference’s “Shared Convictions,” for testing whether these churches measure up? This would likely not be a useful exercise. But these groups claim the name Anabaptist-Mennonite and are seriously aspiring to live accordingly as they understand it. What is more, as avid Bible readers, it is hardly surprising that they should exhibit many similarities with the Anabaptists, whose convictions were also rooted in the study of Scripture.

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41 See Appendix for the text of the "Shared Convictions" which the member churches of the Mennonite World Conference have agreed on. Available online at: [http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions).
Appendix

Mennonite World Conference Shared Convictions
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 17 August 2003

Approved by the General council for study and response by MWC member and associate churches.

Shared Convictions:

By the grace of God we seek to live and proclaim the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. As part of the one body of Christ at all times and places, we hold the following to be central to our belief and practice:

1. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.

2. Jesus is the Son of God who showed in his life and teaching how to be faithful, and through his cross and resurrection redeemed the world.

3. The church is a community of those whom God’s Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.

4. The faith community, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, interprets the Bible in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God’s will for our obedience.

5. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.

6. The faith community gathers regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.

7. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.
In these convictions we draw inspiration from our Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century, who modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. Walking in his name, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we confidently await Christ’s return and the final fulfillment of God’s kingdom.

http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions
Por la gracia de Dios procuramos vivir y proclamar la buena nueva de reconciliación en Jesucristo. Como parte del cuerpo unido de Cristo en todo tiempo y lugar, declaramos que las siguientes afirmaciones son la esencia de nuestra fe y práctica:

1. Conocemos a Dios como Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo, el Creador que tiene el propósito de restaurar a la humanidad caída convocando a un pueblo y llamándolo a ser fiel en fraternidad, adoración, servicio y testimonio.

2. Jesús es el Hijo de Dios. Por medio de su vida y enseñanzas, su cruz y su esurrección, nos mostró cómo ser discípulos fieles, redimió al mundo, y ofrece vida eterna.

3. Como iglesia, somos una comunidad de aquellos a quienes el Espíritu de Dios llama a abandonar el pecado, reconocer que Jesucristo es Señor, recibir el bautismo previa confesión de fe, y seguir a Cristo en la vida.

4. Como comunidad de fe, aceptamos que la Biblia es nuestra autoridad para la fe y la vida, interpretándola juntos bajo la guía del Espíritu Santo a la luz de Jesucristo, para discernir la voluntad de Dios y obedecerla.

5. El Espíritu de Jesús nos llena de poder para confiar en Dios en todos los aspectos de la vida, de manera que lleguemos a ser hacedores de paz que renunciamos a la violencia, amamos a nuestros enemigos, procuramos justicia, y compartimos nuestras posesiones con los necesitados.

6. Nos reunimos regularmente para adorar, para celebrar la Cena del Señor, y para escuchar la Palabra de Dios, dispuestos a dar cuenta unos a otros de nuestros actos.

7. Como familia global de fe y vida trascendemos fronteras de nacionalidad, raza, clase social, género e idioma, y procuramos vivir en el mundo sin conformarnos a los poderes del mal, dando testimonio de la gracia de Dios por medio del servicio a los demás, cuidando de la creación, e invitando a toda la humanidad a conocer a Jesucristo como Salvador y Señor.

Estas convicciones están inspiradas en la fe de nuestros antepasados, los anabautistas del siglo XVI, quienes dieron ejemplo de ser discípulos.
radicales de Jesucristo. Procuramos caminar en su nombre por el poder del Espíritu Santo, esperando confiadamente el regreso de Cristo y el establecimiento definitivo del reino de Dios.

Adoptadas por el Concilio General del Congreso Mundial
Pasadena, California, USA

Marzo 15, 2006
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