Calcutta Connections: Mennonite Service in India

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Mennonite service in India reaches back to the beginning of Mennonite mission efforts at the end of the nineteenth century. The story is picked up here with the first joint Mennonite and Brethren in Christ relief effort during World War II. This in turn led to the first involvement of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in India. Mennonite service there is the story of compassionate relief programs in response to unimaginable suffering caused by human and natural disasters. It evolves within the social contexts of the transition from colonial India ruled by the British Empire to the post-colonial world of independent India and, more recently, in a world shaped by economic globalization.

The focus of Mennonite service in India gradually shifted from disaster relief and material aid to community development in the 1960s. This change included the establishment of a permanent MCC India office in Calcutta and the formation of an Indian Mennonite counterpart known as the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI). By the end of the 1970s, MCC India stopped implementing its own projects in order to work in partnership with Indian organizations and schools that shared its values. Increasingly, most of these partners were not related to the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in India. In more recent decades, MCC has sought to improve the quality of its project planning, monitoring and evaluation. It also began to apply peacebuilding, social justice, gender equality, and environmental screens to all projects.

For its part, MCSFI had to negotiate even more difficult transitions during this half- century of dramatic change. Its constituent Indian churches went through the wrenching shift from the colonial era dominated by foreign mission agencies to the post-colonial era of independence that was thrust on them more quickly than anyone had been prepared for. It led to leadership struggles, protracted litigation over property, and the forced closing and restructuring of mission-era institutions.

Even in the midst of such struggles, the story of Mennonite service in India offers us a legacy of hope that has transformed the lives and faith of

many. When we take a long view of the past century of Mennonite service in that country, as this article seeks to do, the social and spiritual growth that has taken place through these efforts is clearly evident.

Beginnings in Colonial India

Seven missionaries met in Champa in central India in the spring of 1942 to initiate a joint relief effort in response to the rapidly growing humanitarian crisis on the sub-continent during World War II. It was the first collaborative social endeavor involving all the different Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission groups serving in colonial India. Their respective missions had begun working around the turn of the twentieth century and, although it could not have been known to those meeting in Champa, this was already the twilight of the colonial era.

Their first order of business was to form the Mennonite Relief Committee of India, representing five different Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions. Some of these committee members had served in India for many years. P.W. Penner, the treasurer of the newly formed organization, was a General Conference Mennonite Church missionary who had worked for forty years in what is now the state of Chhattisgarh. He sent a cable to the MCC office in North America asking for a monthly contribution of 3,000 rupees (US $1,000) a month for their proposed relief efforts.[1]

The Japanese had conquered neighboring Burma, forcing many native Indians living there to flee across the border into India. Some Indian soldiers fighting at the front deserted to the Japanese in the hope of eventually driving the British colonial government out of India.[2] Social conditions were growing increasingly desperate.[3] A severe cyclone and tidal wave then hit the Bengal coast in October 1942. These tragedies were compounded by food supplies being shipped to the warfront, wartime price inflation, and the indifference of the British colonial government. Even so, there would have been enough food available if a system had been in place to deal with the crisis. None existed. People with means hoarded food and local Indian bureaucrats enriched themselves, leaving the poorest exposed. Historian Lawrence James writes:

> Calcutta in particular acted as a magnet for the most vulnerable: landless laborers, widows, deserted wives, children and the

> aged flocked to the city in desperate hope of finding relief. Many died within sight of well-stocked shops. Beggars swarmed into the city, traveling by train but without tickets, and making it impossible for the authorities to discriminate between opportunists and the genuinely needy. Smallpox, cholera and malaria proliferated among the underfed, adding to a death toll which was officially put at 1.5 million between mid-1943 and mid-1944. It is more likely that the total was nearer 3 million.[4]

MCC responded by immediately forwarding the funds requested by the Mennonite Relief Committee of India (MRCI). Two MRCI representatives visited the most severely affected areas in Bengal and decided to give direct relief aid. Indian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ volunteers from central India traveled to Bengal to help.[5] In addition to depending on these short-term volunteers, MCC appointed two North American service workers and increased its relief funds to 5,250 rupees (US $1,750) a month in 1943. They were soon serving a population of 8,000 people through the distribution of rice, milk, clothing, and medicine. Severe famine conditions were improving by the end of 1944, and the need for direct relief aid was drawing to a close.[6]

There was some thought of ending the MCC presence in India because conditions were improving, but other considerations weighed in favor of staying. These included the fact that Calcutta[7] was near the warfront in Burma and Assam, the possibility of using Calcutta as a base for future relief efforts in China and Java, and the ongoing rehabilitation needs in desperately poor communities in Bengal. Four more North American service workers were sent.[8] Reconstruction efforts included rebuilding houses, organizing an industrial school, continued aid distribution, a dispensary, and small scale livelihood projects. The various programs touched the lives of about 2,000 to 3,000 people. In addition, several MCC service workers were recruited to serve in social projects related to various Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission stations.[9]

Another social crisis developed in East Bengal (now the country of Bangladesh) in 1946. Thousands of Hindus were driven from their homes in this predominantly Muslim area, and the local government was very slow in responding. There were mass burnings and lootings of villages with many

forced conversions; many fled, and their situation as refugees was desperate. Two newly arrived MCC service workers were seconded to the Indian Red Cross to help set up refugee camps. The initial plan was to help displaced Hindus return to their villages, but the force of political developments was leading to the brutal partition of colonial India.[10]

Tensions boiled over in Calcutta. The Muslim League, positioning itself to form a separate Muslim state, called for a day of "Direct Action" on August 16, 1946. The morning began in eerie quiet and then the worst riots between Hindus and Muslims ever remembered in India broke out. Muslim League and Congress cadres had been secretly preparing for this confrontation, a politically manufactured event that brought the entire city to its knees. Electrical power was cut; shops, schools, and offices were shuttered; buildings were reduced to rubble; at least 4,000 people were killed and more then 10,000 were injured.[11] The violence kept spreading in rural Bengal. Mahatma Gandhi, the legendary nonviolent campaigner for Indian independence, arrived in November 1946 and stayed until March of the following year. He and his band of followers crisscrossed Bengal, often walking for long hours, holding prayer meetings, and consoling victims. It was a last, desperate attempt to stem the tide of events, but there was little that he or anyone else could do.[12] Lines of partition between the newly created states of Pakistan and India were hastily drawn. Between half a million and one million people were killed in partition-related violence, and some twelve million more were forced to migrate between the two newly created states.[13] Gandhi refused to join the Indian independence celebrations in New Delhi on August 15, 1947, choosing instead to remain in Calcutta fasting, praying, and spinning. He thought the nationalistic festivities were perverse in the face of all the recent and continuing human suffering.[14]

Relief Efforts in Independent India

There was an expectation that Mennonite relief efforts in response to the humanitarian crisis during World War II would end after the war was over. The refugee crisis caused by the partition of India and Pakistan changed any thought of ending such efforts. Instead, MCC and the Indian Mennonite Churches responded to the needs of refugees in the cities of Calcutta, Delhi, and Amritsar by distributing food and clothing and by giving medical

assistance. The situation was most severe in Pakistan; two MCC service workers were sent there to work in refugee camps around the city of Lahore.[15]

The relief units eventually closed in 1949 after the worst of the partition refugee crisis was over, but several MCC workers continued in service assignments related to the various Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission stations in India.[16] The trend toward independence in the Indian churches made it apparent that MCC was uniquely positioned to facilitate coordination between the various Mennonite-related church groups. Edward and Helen Benedict, a Quaker couple, served as part-time MCC field representatives from 1955 to 1962.[17]

During these years several MCC service workers served at the Barjana Community Agricultural Service Project run by the Brethren in Christ Mission Board in Bihar.[18] Others were sent to work on building projects in Katmandu with the United Mission to Nepal.[19] Refugees kept streaming into Calcutta, and the state government of West Bengal asked MCC to take responsibility for relief work at a large refugee colony outside the city.[20] A poultry project was started in cooperation with India's Department of Agriculture, and a canteen was established for hungry students at the University of Calcutta.[21] This mix of relief and humanitarian assistance projects continued throughout the 1950s.

Laying the Foundation for a Long-Term Presence

It was becoming increasingly evident in the 1960s that foreign mission programs, which had proliferated throughout India during the colonial era, were no longer welcome. The Indian government was reluctant to renew missionary visas, gravely affecting the operation of Mennonite mission churches, schools, and hospitals.[22] In response, a group of concerned church and mission leaders, including P.J. Malagar, the first ordained Indian Mennonite bishop, met during the Mennonite World Conference held in Kitchener, Ontario in 1962. They decided that Orie Miller, MCC's executive director, would travel to India the following year to consult with the Indian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and missionaries in order to consider the future of Mennonite service there.[23]

A meeting was called in Calcutta with representatives from all six different Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church groups, both missionaries

and nationals—the first time there had ever been such a meeting. According to Bishop Malagar, it was "a great milestone in the development of the idea of inter-Mennonite cooperation in India and much needed interaction between a North American organization like MCC and the Indian churches."[24] Several basic operational decisions were made that would set the future course of Mennonite service in India.

It was decided that an all-India organization of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches was needed to continue the relief efforts begun during the war years. The new organization, given the name Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI), would also have an expanded role in helping member churches come to a better understanding of their heritage and in facilitating a joint witness, including peace education. The city of Calcutta was chosen as the operating base for the joint effort that would emerge.[25]

The newly structured program was envisioned as a joint endeavor. MCC would support MCSFI by funding the position of a director who would work with the Indian churches. The director would be the counterpart to the MCC director in India, who would represent the overseas churches. A very close working relationship between the two directors was anticipated.[26] This new partnership would encounter many obstacles in the coming decades.

Vernon Reimer had recently arrived in India to take on the responsibilities of director of MCC programs. He related exceptionally well to the Indian churches and would function in this role for the next ten years. Margaret Devadason was hired as a national staff person in the following year and would become a long-serving MCC India administrator. The national staff would grow to a total of sixteen people by the end of the decade, and would double again in the next decade.[27]

The program began with a strong component of material assistance, but this gradually shifted to a mix of agriculture, health, income generation, education, disaster response, and peacebuilding projects.[28] MCC India stopped implementing its own projects in the 1970s and began working in partnership with various mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, and civil society Indian organizations that shared its development values and goals.[29] MCC India always included a strong urban component in its work, especially through its educational scholarship programs, which made it a

well-known and respected institution serving the schools and needy families in Calcutta.

MCC India developed a competent and very loyal staff who have been deeply committed to MCC faith-based values such as: (1) solidarity with the poor; (2) working with integrity and transparency with partners; (3) serving all people regardless of gender, caste, or creed; (4) working for peace with justice through nonviolent means; and (5) caring for all creation through environmentally sustainable development practices.

However, the location of MCC India in Calcutta was at a considerable distance from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in central India, making it difficult to build strong working relationships with those churches and contributing to the fact that relatively few Indian Mennonites have served on its staff. Even so, a few long-term national MCC staff from Mennonite background developed a deep interest in nurturing a stronger Anabaptist theological perspective in their churches.

The foundation of MCC India in 1963 and its growth in the following decades would follow a paradigm shift from colonial era sensibilities to post-colonial sensibilities. The colonial mission enterprise was envisioned as bringing the Christian faith and Western civilization to native Indian communities,[30] and the North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission agencies working in that era tended to fit uncritically into colonial-era sensibilities and social structures. This changed to a paradigm of "development," where the task was seen as transferring knowledge and resources from the "developed world" to the so-called "underdeveloped world." The '60s and '70s were widely heralded as the decades of development.[31] This ideology, and the neo-colonial global economic structures undergirding it, shaped the work of MCC India. MCC took up the burden of development even though it strove to serve in a way that connected people and empowered local communities. Mennonite faith values also contributed to keeping a critical distance from the nationalism that informed the development paradigm.[32]

Background to the Formation of MCSFI

A complete picture of the formation and subsequent development of MCSFI must be understood in relation to earlier Mennonite and Brethren

in Christ mission programs in colonial India. All the missions had engaged in evangelism and church planting as well as famine relief, healthcare, and education. These efforts included establishing hospitals and primary and secondary schools. Those who converted to Christianity were almost entirely from very poor *Dalit* or outcaste backgrounds. Becoming Christian usually meant being ostracized and sometimes forcibly evicted from their former villages and social networks in predominantly Hindu rural India.[33] Consequently, these first Christians were almost completely dependent on Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission stations for both their social network and their economic base of support. It was fairly common that as many as 85 percent of local Christians relied on the missions for salaries and support for their livelihood.[34] The stations themselves were almost completely dependent on foreign financial resources.

Foreign missionaries came to India out of a deep sense of religious dedication and at enormous personal cost, including frequent illness, emotional trauma, and even death.[35] Yet they lived in rural India in a way that set them apart from the surrounding communities. They built expansive mission stations, including personal dwellings ("bungalows") that had six to eight rooms with high (14 to 16 foot) ceilings, surrounded by a wide veranda. Each missionary family hired a large staff of servants at nominal wages. This placed them in the class of foreign *sahibs* or masters within the socially stratified world of colonial India.[36] There was scant recognition of the contradictions entailed in their association with British imperialism.[37] The missionaries were completely in charge of churches and mission stations. After the first generation, considerable emphasis was placed on nationalizing churches and mission institutions and on making them self-supporting. This was done under the prevailing mission paradigm of self-propagation, self-government, and self-support, known as the "three-self" movement.[38] It was a process filled with many pitfalls and no easy solutions.

The movement toward self-government and self-support was well underway in the 1960s and partly impelled the creation of MCSFI. (This may help explain why MCC administrators were reluctant to give too many external funds to MCSFI in the following decades.) By the middle of the 1970s all the former mission churches and institutions were turned over to national control, and the foreign mission boards were rapidly phasing out

their work. MCC was the only remaining North American-based Mennonite agency with a significant presence in India. The speed and scope of the transition was traumatic for the Indian churches: a secure albeit paternalistic world had passed away, and an independent but more precarious world had emerged.[39]

The Development and Ministry of MCSFI

Bishop Malagar, a gifted and promising Indian church leader in the post-colonial era, was appointed as MCSFI's first director, a position he would hold for the next eighteen years. MCC gave MCSFI an annual grant of US $2,500 to cover the director's salary and related expenses, with the understanding that the Indian churches would gradually assume this financial obligation.[40] Although MCSFI was conceptualized as a national organization, its first board had five North American members and only three Indian members. The first chairman, vice-chairman, and treasurer were all North Americans.[41] The ability to give up control never comes easily, even for followers of Jesus with a theology of servant leadership.

The agenda of the new organization had these aims: (1) to promote Christian service in the spirit of Christ; (2) to work at disaster relief and the alleviation of human suffering; (3) to strengthen the fellowship of its associated churches; and (4) to promote evangelism and a Christian peace witness.[42] It was a bold and perhaps impossible task for a newly created organization representing six different church conferences spread across a huge geographical swath of the country. These churches spoke Hindi, Telegu, Bengali, and various regional dialects, and they had no prior experience of working together. Bishop Malagar and his family moved to Calcutta to take up his new position as MCSFI director, but things got off to a bumpy start when his family could not adapt to their new life there and had to move back to their home town of Dhamtari in central India. The bishop would subsequently make endless overnight train journeys between Dhamtari and Calcutta to do MCSFI work.[43]

The next several years saw a flurry of joint MCSFI and MCC disaster relief work in various parts of India, with volunteers from different Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches traveling to assist these efforts. Bishop Malagar reports that "MCC sought the help of the churches and the response of the churches was immediate and intense."[44]

A major venture, ostensibly through an MCSFI and MCC India partnership, was the establishment of a hospital in a refugee settlement twenty miles north of Calcutta. This effort came in response to a request from the Bengal Refugee Service in cooperation with the West Bengal Health Department.[45] A separate MCSFI medical board was formed in 1964 to oversee the enterprise. Various logistical and financial difficulties kept getting in the way, but the Shyamnagar Christian Hospital finally opened in 1971.[46] Bishop Malagar saw the venture as having good intentions but an unfortunate outcome. Initially, he was the only Indian serving on the medical board; all the others were North American missionaries serving in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ hospitals. The bishop said he "mostly listened and did not say much during board meetings." Gradually, more Indian Mennonites began serving on the board as North American missionary doctors and administrators left the country.[47]

The plan had been to involve the Indian churches directly, but getting church members to move there to serve the hospital and the surrounding community was difficult. There was a constant turnover of staff and administrators, and people from the community were never involved or brought into confidence.[48] The medical board eventually decided to close the hospital and turn the property over to the West Bengal government in 1979. A final indignity occurred when Bishop Malagar was appointed as secretary of the medical board in order to sign the legal transfer papers, even though he deeply regretted the need for this action.[49]

Several additional joint MCSFI and MCC India efforts in that period included service assignments in other parts of Asia. An Indian couple served in Vietnam under Vietnam Christian Services. Another Indian family served in Bangladesh. In the 1980s a medical team from the Dhamtari Christian Hospital went to Cambodia, and a doctor couple from the hospital served there for several years.[50]

A major MCSFI undertaking was promoting the peace witness of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. Bishop Malagar arranged for Norman Kraus, an American Mennonite theologian, to teach at Serampore College in 1966-67. Kraus traveled and spoke in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches across India during that time, and kept returning on peace education assignments with the Mennonite churches in following years.

Reflecting on these experiences, he wrote that he had "a feeling that 'peace witness' in India means first of all sharing God's infinite loving patience with people who think of almost everyone as a potential enemy."[51] India has known incredible exploitation from both local elites and foreign conquerors and colonists that has fostered deep-seated distrust and a reluctance to share or delegate power. A common tragedy is that historically injured people tend to re-inflict injuries on each other; long-standing wounds must be healed in order to create a vibrant Christ-centered peace witness characterized by trust and mutual respect.

Bishop Malagar thought the Mennonite peace witness needed more radicalism and involvement in real-life situations. He lamented that no Mennonite or Brethren in Christ missionary in India ever became nationally known for his or her peace stance. Furthermore, the mission boards and MCC never saw fit to help Indian Mennonites establish a peace center. He wrote:

> We have undertaken no "peace mission" and joined no "peace march" protesting against nuclear holocaust. We have not espoused the cause of the poor and downtrodden for social justice. We have lacked passion for the redress of injustices and the cessation of exploitation. We have accepted too easily the corruption in the government and society. We have been too placid and acted in a withdrawn manner. Possibly the Indian Mennonites need to develop their own genius in this field rather than just become too intelligent in Anabaptist history and theology.[52]

The most consistent and highly valued activity of MCSFI throughout its history was organizing all-India church conferences, trainings, and retreats as a way to build fellowship between Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and to encourage each other in their Christian faith. It is hard to overstate the significance of this ministry during a most difficult period in the history of these churches.[53]

Assessing MCSFI as an Organization

The energy of MCSFI, including the number of activities it was involved in, was clearly in decline after its first decade. Organizationally it had not

grown beyond the position of the director, which still depended on foreign funds. Member conferences were often in arrears of the annual dues they had agreed to contribute, bringing into question the depth of grassroots support in the churches.[54]

Assessments of MCSFI's organizational viability go back to a self-study conducted in 1975. Representatives from each member conference all expressed their appreciation and support for MCSFI. There was considerable concern that MCSFI was not as active as it had been and that member church conferences were not giving adequate support. The consensus was that MCSFI should "remain largely a fellowship of churches, sharing needs and resources and seeking to strengthen each other."[55] The self-study did not bring substantial changes. Bishop Malagar resigned as director in 1981. Rev. R. S. Lemuel, a Mennonite Brethren leader, became director from 1981 to 1993. Bishop Shant Kunjam, a Mennonite Church of India leader, then served as director from 1993 to 2002.[56] Both of them had even less success in reactivating the ministry of MCSFI or in developing its capacity as a service agency. Their job involved the difficult tasks of relating both to a far-flung, often bickering church constituency and to generally critical MCC India staff and directors.[57] MCSFI, however, maintained the vital roles of bringing Mennonite and Brethren in Christ representatives together semi-annually to discuss shared interests and of organizing events that kept the churches in relationship with each other. It provided the one common forum for developing an Anabaptist identity, witness, and service among these churches.

A major consultation was held between MCSFI, MCC, and CIM (Commission on International Mission) in 1991 with the purpose of reviewing MCSFI's work. In retrospect, the consultation failed to address the real constraints to the growth of MCSFI and its ministry. A telling indication of the tenor of the consultation is a paper on "dependency" presented by a North American participant. The author wanted to move beyond a relationship of dependency to one of true reciprocity and partnership, but the way he defined dependency reflects American values of independence and self-sufficiency rather than the more communitarian Indian cultural values. Furthermore, the author proposed no concrete plan for creating more reciprocal and mutually accountable partnerships.[58] On a different note, an

Indian Mennonite Brethren leader at the consultation wrote:

> We Christians in India love the Lord but the command to love our neighbor seems to escape our attention. There is a need to have some programmes for the non-Christian community around us, supported primarily by the churches of India. This will provide a much stronger witness and we shall be fulfilling the command to love our neighbor.[59]

One way of assessing the inertia in MCSFI during those years is to see it in relation to substantial shifts in its external environment. The traumatic transition from a colonial to a post-colonial world and its effect on Indian churches has already been mentioned. This transition created organizational and leadership challenges that many could not handle constructively. In addition, MCC India was MCSFI's major partner and source of funds in the 1960s and '70s. During this era MCC India had implemented various relief and development projects, often in communities where there were Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. But MCC India would profoundly alter this way of working.

In 1978 Bert Lobe, then serving as MCC India director, told the MCSFI annual general meeting that MCC was changing its method of operation. It would no longer administer programs itself but instead would move toward partnerships with indigenous organizations. According to Lobe, "our objective is to provide consultative advice and financial assistance to projects which are well organized, committed to true development, and work towards self-reliance with the support of the surrounding community."[60] MCSFI did not have the necessary staff or organizational capacity to implement projects itself, and no effort was made to help it develop such capacity. During the following decades, MCC India instead worked at Mennonite and Brethren in Christ related community development through small conference-level organizations. Organizational weakness, financial mismanagement, and internal church tensions kept them from performing according to MCC, external donor, and Indian government expectations. Consequently, these partnerships were gradually phased out, and the conference-level organizations were disbanded or continued to exist in name only.[61]

It became expedient for MCC India to work in partnership with larger or better organized Indian service agencies that had the capacity to respond

to disasters in an efficient and timely way and that could handle large projects in accordance with external planning, monitoring, and evaluation requirements. Eventually only a small fraction of the total MCC India program would be done in partnership with MCSFI or the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches.

Several Mennonite and Brethren in Christ related schools, hospitals, and student hostels have continued serving their communities with local resources, but the fiscal and organizational viability of most of them has been precarious. Failure to help build the organizational capacity of both MCSFI and local Mennonite and Brethren is Christ service agencies greatly constrained MCC India's ability to do quality relief and development work with the churches. Various MCC administrators have felt frustrated by this, because MCC sees itself as the service arm of the global Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. More recently, a concerted effort has arisen to help MCSFI develop its capacity to do relief, development, and peacebuilding programming. Rev. Emmanuel Minj, who became MCSFI director in 2002, had prior experience as an administrator in a major Indian company and was deeply committed to the life and service of Indian churches. His background was well suited to the needs of MCSFI at this juncture.

Under Rev. Minj's administration, MCSFI has established an office at a church center developed in cooperation with Bihar Mennonite Mandli in Ranchi, Jharkhand.[62] Initial steps to build the organization faced difficulties, but organizers were gradually able to recruit a small staff that has successfully managed several projects in partnership with constituent Indian churches and MCC India. These include a rural water project in Jharkhand, peace training for local churches, HIV/AIDS training, and vocational education scholarships through Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conference offices. They also coordinated several disaster relief projects. When the Kosi River flooded and displaced two million people in the state of Bihar in 2008, MCSFI organized a major relief response that included the efforts of local Brethren in Christ volunteers. In addition, MCSFI has set up all-India retreats and conferences for Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches.[63]

MCSFI conducted another organizational assessment in 2009. Unlike previous assessments, this one included no representatives from

North American Mennonite mission agencies. Instead, delegates from the constituent Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conferences met in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The meeting was facilitated by an Indian Mennonite consultant. Participants affirmed that MCSFI will relate to its constituent church conferences in mission work through a partnership model. It will function like any other partner of MCC India, with special consideration for MCSFI's ability to do wholistic mission work. MCSFI will also work independently of MCC India and build partnerships with other bodies and funding agencies.[64] This reflects the growing maturity and organizational strength of MCSFI and its constituent churches. In turn, it bodes well for the future of Mennonite service in India.

Indian Social Realities

The social situation in India has changed dramatically since representatives from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions met in 1942 in response to the humanitarian crisis created by World War II and the Bengal famine. Famines have been a cyclical part of India's history when the monsoon rains fail. Since independence, however, the Indian government has been able to respond to such crop failures in ways that averted mass famine. That in itself is a significant achievement.[65] At the time of Indian independence in 1947, public health services were in shambles, life expectancy was a mere 32.5 years, a public education system was almost nonexistent, and literacy stood at only 17 percent.[66] In comparison, life expectancy in 2005 had increased to 63.5 years. Basic education continues to be woefully inadequate, but the literacy rate in 2005 climbed to 61 percent.[67] Practically no economic growth occurred throughout the entire colonial period, but the economy began to grow slowly in the decades following independence and has been growing at a robust 6 percent a year since 1991. It has increased to an even more phenomenal growth rate of 8 or 9 percent in the past few years.[68]

Such economic growth has created a whole new middle class, but the persistence of a huge underbelly of extreme poverty remains a critical social problem. According to World Bank figures, extreme poverty declined from 60 percent of the population in 1981 to 42 percent in 2005. However, the total number of people living below the extreme poverty benchmark of US $1.25 a day increased from 421 million in 1981 to 456 million in 2005.[69] People

from oppressed tribal and *Dalit* or outcaste groups (especially women and children) are the most destitute.

Migrating to large urban centers in search of menial work is the only choice for many poverty-stricken people. For example, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) remains a magnet for economic refugees from the surrounding states that are among the poorest in India. The city had a population of about 4 million when MCC India began working there in the 1940s and is a mega-city of 15 million today.[70] In the '40s thousands of Hindu refugees from East Bengal camped out at the Sealdah railway station several blocks from the present MCC India office; they had no other place to go, but the city eventually absorbed them. Today poor immigrants from Bihar, Orissa, and Bangladesh keep finding their way into Kolkata, one of the world's poorest, most congested, and most polluted major cities. Impoverished new arrivals live on the streets, earn something through menial labor, save a little, and eventually find a relatively more secure life. Poverty on the streets looks the same, but it involves a continual turnover as new immigrants replace those who move one rung up on the social ladder.[71]

Mennonite Responses

Social service has always been at the heart of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ efforts in India. Such service is theologically rooted in the understanding of God as creator and of God's care for the whole creation. It is also rooted in Jesus' teaching that serving each other is central in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:24-30). South American Mennonite theologian Alfred Neufeld writes: "We serve as Christ serving others. A culture of service is necessary to respond to so many urgent human needs: lack of health, education, food and family; spiritual and economic poverty; the need for companionship, comfort and joy."[72]

The program of MCC India is rooted in this theology of service. From the very beginning, MCC India has helped Kolkata's impoverished masses find a better life. Education assistance has been central to an effort that also includes health and income generation projects. On a given day of the week, the children of poor laborers and domestic servants line up outside the MCC India office to apply for and receive educational scholarships. One of the most consistent ways in which poor families have lifted themselves out of poverty has been through the education of their children.

The other side of the coin is addressing the needs of rural India that force poor villagers to migrate to urban centers like Kolkata. India is dependent on the monsoon rains for the water necessary to grow crops, yet more than 70 percent of India's rainfall runs off into the sea.[73] MCC India's rural development work responds to this challenge with projects designed to harvest water through catchments and check dams and to use it to extend the growing season. Introducing vegetable farming helps to diversify cropping, supplies better nutrition, and provides an alternative source of income. The formation of self-help groups seeks to empower women, youth, and farmers through micro-credit schemes and rights-based approaches to development. Sloping agriculture technology is employed; it involves soil conservation and revitalization through contouring fields, planting trees along field perimeters, inter-cropping, and using organic compost. Still other projects work at rural health and HIV/AIDS programs. More recent projects focus on peacebuilding in response to communal and interfaith violence. Gender, environmental, and peacebuilding screens are applied to all projects.[74]

MCSFI has recently partnered directly with MCC India through the implementation of rural water, peacebuilding, HIV/AIDS, and vocational education projects, and disaster relief. Such projects have seen collaboration with Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. An ongoing challenge is how to collaborate effectively across geographical distances, linguistic divides, and distinct conference cultures among constituent churches. MCSFI has also sought to nurture Anabaptist faith and witness, including a Christian peace witness, among these churches. A recent peacebuilding effort is the creation of a "Centre for Peace Studies" at the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College in Andhra Pradesh. The Centre teaches practical conflict mediation skills and Anabaptist peace theology to seminary students, and plans to serve as a resource for Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches.[75] Another activity has focused on peacebuilding in the Kandhamal District, Orissa, after Hindu militants attacked Christian churches and villages in 2008. The Brethren in Christ conference in Orissa is spearheading an ecumenical effort to bring interfaith harmony to villages through conflict mediation training, youth activities, and organizing local peace committees.[76]

Discerning the Future

The 2009 gathering of Indian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church leaders in Ranchi to assess MCSFI may be a landmark in the development of Mennonite service in India. It demonstrated the churches' growing maturity both within Indian society and in the global fellowship of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. These churches were now at a very different place than they had been when the missionaries met in Champa in 1942 to organize a joint response to a humanitarian crisis. Delegates at the meeting in Ranchi strongly reaffirmed the value of collaborative Mennonite social action in India. Their decisions showed their appreciation and support of MCSFI's growing capacity as the joint service arm of the churches; MCSFI would work in partnership with MCC India but also form other significant partnerships or initiate self-standing service projects. They also reflect changes within the global socio-political order as countries like India and China become increasingly significant economic and political powers. Such developments call for structural changes within the global church.

In 2007 MCC began a global "Appreciative Inquiry" process called "New Wine/New Wineskins" designed to "engage all MCC stakeholders in discerning God's direction by creating a unifying vision and revised structure for MCC." The purpose of such envisioned restructuring is to better share "God's love and compassion for all 'In the Name of Christ' by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice."[77] One hoped-for outcome is to change the current structure of MCC international programs with the long-term goal of creating more national and multi-nation entities.[78] This has ramifications for future service. One can imagine MCC India eventually becoming a self-standing Indian entity in collaboration with other national entities that form a more globally structured MCC, rather than functioning as the country office of a North American agency.[79]

Whatever the future may hold, the global fellowship of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches can learn from, and draw on, the rich legacy of the past mission efforts. The centrality of service is part of that legacy which can inspire renewed activity today. For example, while India has made enormous social progress since independence, masses of people still live in debilitating poverty. Working with these people and helping to empower

them will remain central to Mennonite service in India in the foreseeable future.

North American and European mission agencies need to repent of their past associations with colonialism in India and other parts of the world, but we can learn from that experience. The Indian independence movement, along with many other independence movements in the global South, ushered in a post-colonial world. Yet new forms of domination persist in the global political and economic order. We will, therefore, want to pay attention to the ways in which early Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission efforts were compromised by their association with the colonial world of British India. We should read it as a cautionary tale. Might our generation be as uncomprehending as they were about how mission programs, service projects, and people-to-people church relationships are distorted by present ideologies and power imbalances? This requires a continuing conversation in the global church.[80]

If we can see further, it is partly because we are standing on the shoulders of our Mennonite and Brethren in Christ forebears. Their service in India is a story of bridging worlds and struggling together to be followers of Jesus. It has involved the challenges and joys of building partnerships that empower poor and marginalized people. Through such efforts, they have grown in their ability to link hands ecumenically and across religious divides. Yes, it has included failures such as an inability to understand or trust each other, an unwillingness to relinquish power when necessary, not fully recognizing how dominant political and economic ideologies have shaped their imaginations, and having good intentions without sufficient planning or foresight. Yet people have persevered, grown spiritually, and developed their capacity to serve faithfully in exceptionally difficult situations. By doing so, they have given us a fertile legacy that can inform future Mennonite and Brethren in Christ service in India and around the world.

Notes

[1] "Minutes: Joint-Meeting of all Mennonite Missions working in India on Relief work at Champa, C.P., April 9, 1942;" Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN [hereafter AMC], Box IX 28-1 MCC India 1/4.
[2] Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 573-78.
[3] An immediate concern was the dire situation of war evacuees as well as German and Italian prisoners of war being held in India. Letter from W.W. Bell of the YMCA to Rev. Penner, August 21, 1942. AMC, Box IX MCC India 1/17.
[4] James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*, 579.
[5] P. J. Malagar, "Reminiscences, Observations and Comments Regarding Mennonite Central Committee India/MCSFI" (unpublished paper in the Historical Library & Archives: Research Center for Mennonite Studies in India, Shamshabad, Hyderabad [hereafter HL &A]), 1.
[6] "Minutes: Mennonite Relief Committee of India, Champa, C.P., January 10, 1947;" AMC, Box IX 28-1 MCC India 1/4. An 11-page paper titled "History and Present Status of the MCC Program" is attached to the minutes. This paper was read by Martin Schrag, secretary of MRCI, at the 1947 meeting. The minutes do not identify who wrote the paper.
[7] The city's name was changed from anglicized spelling of "Calcutta" to the more Bengali spelling of "Kolkata" in 2001. In this paper I use the former spelling in historical references and the latter in contemporary references.
[8] The four service workers were Harold Sherk, R.C. Kaufman, Clayton Beyler, and J. Lawrence Burkholder. Sherk and Burkholder then also helped provide relief in China. See "Minutes: Mennonite Relief Committee of India, Champa, C.P., January 10, 1947," AMC, Box IX 28-1 MCC India 1/4; "History and Present Status of the MCC Program," 2.
[9] Still others were recruited for a planned ministry in Java. "History and Present Status of the MCC Program," 3.
[10] Ibid., 4-5.
[11] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (London: Penguin, 2007): 63-66.
[12] Ibid., 69-70.
[13] Ibid., 6.
[14] Ibid., 151-52.
[15] MCC shipped 41 tons of food and clothing to India in 1947, and two more carloads of cereal were on the way. See the Archival Records from the *Mennonite Central Committee Workbook: 1947.* MCC Archives, Akron, PA.
[16] Archival Records from the *Mennonite Central Committee Workbook: 1949.* MCC Archives, Akron, PA.
[17] The Benedicts were serving with the United Mission Society in Calcutta. During those years the MCC office was located at Lee Memorial Mission, a Methodist church center at Wellington Square in Calcutta. This connection explains why the United Missionary Church in India has been active in Mennonite circles and became a member of the Mennonite World

Conference even as its parent United Missionary Church in North America left its Mennonite heritage. See *Mennonite Central Committee, India: Six Decades of Building Hope, 1940-99.* MCC India Library, Kolkata.

[18] Archival Records from 1958_08EX. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[19] Archival Records from 1956_08EX. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[20] Archival Records from 1959_03EX. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[21] Archival Records from 1959_08EX. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[22] P. J. Malagar, "Original Vision of MCSFI: Its Implementation," paper presented at the MCSFI/CIM/MCC Consultation, Lee Memorial Centre, Calcutta, Nov. 15-16, 1992. MCC India Library, Kolkata; also in HL & A.

[23] P.J. Malagar, "Reminiscences, Observations and Comments," 2.

[24] Ibid., 2-3.

[25] Rev. Alfred Rees, a United Missionary Society missionary, presented a persuasive challenge to include an urban social ministry in the city of Calcutta. This seems to have swayed the decision to keep Calcutta as the base of operations. Ibid., 3.

[26] Ibid.

[27] *Mennonite Central Committee, India: Six Decades of Building Hope: 1940-99.* MCC India Library, Kolkata.

[28] MCC India gradually became one of the biggest and strongest MCC country programs in the world with annual budgets of between one to three million US dollars. (Information gathered from various annual reports in the MCC India Library, Kolkata.)

[29] A. C. Lobe, "MCC India – History, Program and Method of Operation," paper presented at the May 5, 1978 annual general meeting, MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[30] This way of depicting their mission efforts is delightfully depicted by a photograph on the inside cover of the book *Twenty-five Years with God in India* (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1929). The photograph shows missionaries in a 1920s-era automobile meeting Indian natives riding on elephants. Underneath the picture is this paragraph: "The East coming out to meet the West. Since early history, the East had been out on a great quest. Her spices, pearls and material treasures do not satisfy. Her holy rivers, holy writings and her holy men do not satisfy. 'How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent?'"

[31] Akhil Gupta writes, "Development discourse makes people subjects in both senses that Foucault emphasizes: subjected to someone else by a relationship of control and dependence and tied to one's own identity through self-knowledge. 'Developed' and 'underdeveloped' are not just terms that indicate the positions of nation-states in an objective matrix . . . . They are also, and to my mind far more importantly, forms of identity in the postcolonial world." Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), 39-40.

[32] An informative book on Mennonite development perspectives is Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi, *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/ Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004).

[33] An insightful chapter on this sociological phenomenon is by Saurabh Dube, "Issues of Christianity in Colonial Chhattisgarh," in Rowenda Robinson, ed., *Sociology of Religion in*

India (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 231-55. The chapter was originally published in *Sociological Bulletin* 41.1 & 2 (1992): 97-117.

[34] James C. Juhnke, *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 35.

[35] P. J. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India* (Nagpur: The National Council of Churches in India, 1981), 33.

[36] John A. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 74-75. As I visit these former mission stations today with Indian Mennonites, someone will invariably mention that the missionaries lived like royalty. One church leader recalled the awe he felt as a little boy when he visited their homes and saw all their servants and the manicured lawns.

[37] For example, the General Conference Mennonite missionaries used the authority of the British Chief Commissioner to persuade the local Indian king to lease them a suitable eight-acre tract of land for their mission station. See Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 22-24.

[38] P.J. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India,* 41.

[39] More research needs to be done on the reasons behind this rapid transition. The Indian government's refusal to renew missionary visas was certainly the primary reason, but there also appears to have been declining support for such mission efforts among Mennonites in North America. A excellent account of the transition in one conference is contained in a thesis submitted to the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune by Sushant Rajat Nand, "Bharathya General Conference Mennonite Church in Chhattisgarh, From 1980-2005." MCC India Library, Kolkata; also in HL & A.

[40] Archival Records from 1963_03EX. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[41] Memorandum of Association of Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India, Certificate of Registration No. S/ 8816 of 67-68 Government of West Bengal. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata; also in HL & A.

[42] Ibid.

[43] The children had to switch to a new language of instruction in school and were not able to adjust to "city congestion, traffic, and rotting garbage." The whole family got dengue fever and their youngest son required emergency hospitalization. See P.J. Malagar, "Reminiscences, Observations and Comments," 3-4.

[44] Such work involved a cooperative network of other organizations such as Lutheran World Service, Oxfam, and CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action). Pooling funds and personnel was a common practice. A significant disaster relief project was conducted in response to a devastating cyclone that struck the Chittagong area of present-day Bangladesh in 1963. Ibid., 4-5.

[45] Archival Records from *Mennonite Central Committee Workbook: 1964.* MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[46] *Mennonite Central Committee: 50 Years of Service in India* [1993]. MCC India Library, Kolkata.

[47] In his reminiscences of these events, Bishop Malagar wrote, "It was the saddest day when we had to bury our hopes since we had not given the Indian Mennonite churches any chances, even a chance to consider taking over, to add insult to injury I was appointed secretary of

the board to effect the actual transfer and to sign the instrument of legal transfer which I did very reluctantly." See P.J. Malagar, "Reminiscences, Observations and Comments," 8. See also "Minutes of the MCSFI Medical Board Meeting," January 20, 1979. MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[48] Efforts to turn the hospital over to the Emmanuel Hospital Association proved futile because the government had not given the medical board a clear lease agreement on the property. A.C. Lobe, "Secretary's Report to the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India Medical Board Annual General Meeting," February 19, 1979, MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[49] Malagar, "Reminiscences," 8.

[50] Ibid., 5. See also Emmanuel Minj, "A Brief History of MCSFI." MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[51] Archival Records from *Mennonite Central Committee Workbook: 1966.* MCC Archives, Akron, PA.

[52] Malagar, "Reminiscences," 7.

[53] MCSFI also functioned as the host agency for international meetings and conferences, including the 13th Mennonite World Conference Assembly, held in Calcutta in 1997. Emmanuel Minj, "A Brief History of MCSFI." MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[54] MCSFI did not even have an office for several years. The MCC India director had asked that the office in the MCC building in Calcutta be vacated because of concerns that the Indian government would think MCC India was directly involved in the teaching and evangelistic ministries of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. Letter from David Gerber, MCC Director, to MCSFI Executive Committee Members, May 15, 1999. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata. A year earlier Gerber had written a confidential three-page memo in which he expressed serious doubts about the continuing viability of MCSFI as an organization. See "MCSFI and the Future," April 20, 1998. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[55] They affirmed the objectives of MCSFI as: (1) social services, relief, and development; (2) evangelism and church planting; and (3) the distinctive teaching of the Anabaptist faith such as peace and witness. Report of the MCSFI Self Study held on May 2, 1975 at the Lee Memorial Centre, Calcutta. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata; also in HL & A.

[56] Emmanuel Minj, "A Brief History of MCSFI." MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata. More research needs to be done on the period in the history of MCSFI. Rev. R. S. Lemuel especially worked on strengthening relationships between the various conferences. Files for the years when he was director are contained in HL & A.

[57] One of the most critical observations I found in my research reads, "MCSFI was set up by MCC in the 60s and continues to be dependent on MCC funding however limited. Is it any wonder that it be so? It was not created because the grass roots felt a need for it, and they still don't see its importance. It is MCC's baby whether we like it or not. Whether the churches want the responsibility of adopting a lazy spoiled baby is not yet clear. Neither is it clear if the baby will mature into adulthood with no support from underneath and a parent ashamed to claim him." See Fred Kauffman, "Reflections on Korba Meeting MCC/MCSFI," Oct. 20, 1980. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[58] Dr. Glen Miller, "Dependency," MCSFI/CIM/MCC Consultation, Nov. 15-16, 1991, Calcutta, India. MCC India Library, Kolkata; also in HL & A.

[59] Dr. P.B. Arnold, "Keynote Address," MCSFI/CIM/MCC Consultation, Nov. 15-16, 1991, Calcutta, India. MCC India Library, Kolkata; also in HL & A.
[60] A. C. Lobe, "MCC India – History, Program and Method of Operation," paper presented to the May 5, 1978 MCFI Annual General Meeting. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.
[61] MCC India director Edward Miller raised these issues related to the capacity of the Mennonite Brethren Development Organization (MBDO) in Andhra Pradesh to handle a development project. His concerns include the fact that MBDO has filed no tax returns and appointed no external auditor, the Mennonite Brethren churches are not even contributing to the director's salary, and the past failure of MBDO to do completion reports on relief activities. Miller also reports that past MCC India development partnerships with four other Mennonite local conference organizations were closed because of their mismanagement and failure to complete projects. He insists that any MBDO project funded by MCC would have to be through MCSFI and with prior MCSFI approval. See letter from Edward Miller to Darren Duerksen, August 25, 2003. MCC India, MB Church and MBDO file, Kolkata.
[62] Neil Janzen, "Mennonite Central Committee Management Trip to Ranchi, Jharkhand," July 17-18, 2007. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.
[63] Emmanuel Minj, "A Brief History of MCSFI." MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.
[64] The consultation affirmed that the mission of MCSFI includes the following activities: (1) intra and inter-conference fellowship, (2) meaningful engagement with other communities and religions, (3) peace and justice interventions, (4) facilitating the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized communities, (5) disaster relief and rehabilitation, and (6) working to enhance and revive the Anabaptist and Mennonite movement among its constituent churches. "MCSFI – Looking Ahead Policy Statement," adopted at the Joint Consultation on Mission and Service at Ranchi Jharkhand on March 4, 2009. MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.
[65] Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Times* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 175.
[66] Ibid., 174-76.
[67] Dan Smith, *The Penguin State of the World Atlas,* 8th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 124-25.
[68] Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 39.
[69] New Global Poverty Estimates – What it means for India: http://www.worldbank.org.in/ (accessed on Aug. 1, 2009).
[70] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population: http://www.un.org/esa/population/ (accessed on Aug. 1, 2009).
[71] Robert D. Kaplan, "Oh! Kolkata!" *The Atlantic* (April 2008) http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200804/kolkata (accessed on Aug. 1, 2009).
[72] Alfred Neufeld, *What We Believe Together: Exploring the "Shared Convictions" of Anabaptist-Related Churches* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007), 134.
[73] Luce, *In Spite of the Gods,* 338.
[74] *MCC India Annual Report 2008.* MCC India Library, Kolkata.
[75] Rev. I. P. Asheervadam, "Concept Paper: Centre for Peace Studies of the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College." MCC India MCSFI files, Kolkata.

[76] General Plan Format: "Orissa Communal and Interfaith Peacebuilding, Dec. 8, 2009 (MCC India Orissa files, Kolkata). Both the Centre for Peace Studies and the Orissa peacebuilding effort involved a partnership between MCC India, MCSFI, and area Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conferences.

[77] http://mcc.org/newwineskins/ (accessed on Aug. 1, 2009).

[78] Ibid.

[79] An external matter that may force MCC's hand in making MCC India a self-standing entity is the Indian government's reluctance to give work visas to expatriates to serve as directors of MCC India. A more positive factor is that national service agencies are legally able to access resources within India while branch offices of foreign agencies are not able to do so. Such restructuring also raises the matter of the relationship between MCC India and MCSFI. Might we even envision the merger of MCC India and MCSFI into one Mennonite service agency?

[80] For pertinent insight into ways in which colonialism and structures of power shape Christian mission and theology, see Joerg Rieger, *Globalization and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 2010.

Earl Zimmerman and his wife Ruth recently completed a term of service with the Mennonite Central Committee as Regional Representatives for India, Nepal, and Afghanistan.