

# Mennonite World Review

Global Anabaptism today

## PROTESTS DECLARE BLACK LIVES MATTER

**RIGHT:** People in Minneapolis gathered May 30 in the neighborhood where George Floyd was killed by police to clean up riot damage and remember his life. *Story on page 3.*

**FAR RIGHT:** Todd Gusler, pastor of Rossmere Mennonite Church in Lancaster Pa., holds a sign proclaiming "Black Lives Matter to God" during a silent vigil in Lancaster on June 5.



Karla Hovde



Dale D. Gehman for MWR

## Anabaptist World Inc. executive director appointed

Mennonite World Review Inc.  
The Mennonite Inc.

Danielle Klotz of Goshen, Ind., director of marketing and communication for Mennonite Mission Network, has been named executive director of Anabaptist World Inc., the new independent journalistic ministry being formed by the merger of Mennonite World Review Inc. and The Mennonite Inc. on Sept. 1.



Klotz

The Anabaptist World Inc. board of directors announced the appointment June 8.

Klotz has served with Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, since 2014, first as a development associate and then as content team manager, before assuming her current role in 2019.

She has managed the agency's communication strategy as well as the departmental budget and staff. She has overseen the production of its published materials, including *Beyond* magazine, and helped develop new digital products, including the *Merienda Menonita* podcast, a partnership between Mennonite Mission Network and The Mennonite Inc.

She is a graduate of Hesston *See Anabaptist, page 3*

## East German history an unfinished conversation

By MARK JANTZEN  
For Mennonite World Review

**B**runo Götzke, a Mennonite pastor and refugee from East Prussia, sensed early in 1953 the police were taking too much interest in his efforts to establish roughly a dozen new centers of worship for Mennonites in East Germany.

To avoid arrest as authorities contemplated banning Mennonites from the country, he fled to the home of Erich Schultz, the elder of Berlin Mennonite Church in West Berlin. From there he and his wife, Charlotte, moved to the safety of West Germany, where he lived out his days as the elder of Backnang Mennonite Church near Stuttgart.

Although the East German state did not carry through with its efforts to expel Mennonites,



Berlin Mennonite Church

Life and community continue today as people share a meal at Berlin Mennonite Church.

the pressure did end attempts to set up regular worship centers for the up to 2,000 Mennonite refugees who had settled in the Soviet occupation zone, which became East Germany after

World War II. After the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, a single congregation for all of East Germany was established for the roughly 700 Mennonites who remained.

On May 23, during the annual German Mennonite conference, Bernhard Thiessen, a retired Mennonite pastor who served in the Berlin congregation in the *See Berlin, page 13*

## 'Mosaic' name celebrates conferences' reconciliation

**■ New body one of largest, most diverse in MC USA**

By EMILY RALPH SERVANT  
Mosaic Mennonite Conference

Eastern District & Franconia Conference has become Mosaic Mennonite Conference, a change announced during a conference-wide virtual worship service on Pentecost Sunday, May 31.

With about 8,500 members in five states, the new conference is now one of the largest and most diverse in Mennonite Church

USA. Its office is in Lansdale, Pa. Mosaic Mennonite Conference was formed by the reconciliation of Eastern District Conference and Franconia Mennonite Conference in 2019. The new conference includes congregations in California that transferred in 2017 from Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.



*We're different people; we're allowed to experience Jesus in different ways. Each piece in this new mosaic that we're forming has the ability to shine. — Danilo Sanchez*

Nine congregations in Florida that were formerly part of Southeast Mennonite Conference, plus one additional Florida congrega-

tion, are currently "partners in ministry" of the new conference. Mosaic Conference delegates will vote this fall on whether to

receive these congregations as full members.

"As the reconciled Eastern District & Franconia Conference, we are excited about the future that God is calling us into," conference moderator Ken Burkholder said in the announcement video on May 31. "We believe it is appropriate to mark this transition in our collective history with a new name."

The name, Mosaic Mennonite Conference, was affirmed by the conference board in February. Of nearly 50 suggestions, "Mosaic" *See Reconciled, page 3*

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MARK & ALICE H. JANTZEN

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## NEWS

# Berlin has stories to tell, 30 years after wall fell

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late 1990s, offered an online presentation on this story and many others related to living as Mennonites under a Communist regime.

Thiessen has developed a traveling exhibition on the topic and was scheduled to display it at the conference. When the conference was moved to an online format due to COVID-19, a session on his research became the last event in the day's schedule and was attended by more than 100 people.

Two factors motivated Thiessen's research project. It has now been 30 years since the dramatic events of the peaceful revolution that overthrew Communist rule in East Germany, which allowed for the unification of Germany and the reunification of Berlin Mennonite Church in 1990.

When he was pastor in Berlin, Thiessen sensed a great many stories related to life in East Germany had not been told or fully acknowledged in the congregation, which remained centered around the *Menno-Heim* church building in West Berlin. He seeks to tell these stories through an exhibition, research, writing and a German-language website, [mennoniten-ddr.de](http://mennoniten-ddr.de).

## Generations of refugees

A Mennonite presence in Berlin goes back to the congregation's founding in 1887. Mennonites started moving to the city, which in 1871 became the imperial capital of Germany.

The end of World War II brought a wave of refugees from West and East Prussia, the largest Mennonite area of settlement in Germany. Refugees settled in the Soviet occupation zone, where they had been overtaken by the Soviet army or — in some cases — where they were dumped when returning from Soviet camps.

They were thus spread over the entire territory of East Germany, making the gathering efforts of Bruno Götzke necessary. Since it was known that many Mennonites had supported the Nazis and that the postwar Communist rulers were hostile to religion, tension and repression were inevitable.

Thiessen reported on two eras of Mennonite life behind the Berlin Wall. After the wall went up in 1961 it was no longer possible for Mennonites from East Germany to gather in the church building in West Berlin.

Walter and Berta Jantzen lived in East Berlin, and Walter was on the church board. Although trained as an auto mechanic, he began preaching and providing pastoral care to members in the east.



Displaced Mennonites arrive in the mid-1940s to the ruins of Berlin. Mennonite refugees — expelled from the historically German region of Prussia as the Soviet Union removed the German-speaking people — settled in East Germany after World War II.

Mennonite Library and Archives

He managed to get a new congregation, the Mennonite Congregation of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany's official name), registered by 1963. Jantzen found Protestant and Baptist congregations willing to allow Mennonites space to meet and held occasional church services in a half dozen East German cities.

After Jantzen's retirement in 1980, Knuth Hansen, a pastor in the large former state Protestant church, was released from his duties there to serve as Mennonite pastor for the East German Mennonites until the two congregations reunited in 1990. By then, worship services were mostly held only once a month in

*After the wall went up in 1961 it was no longer possible for Mennonites from East Germany to gather in the church building in West Berlin.*

that any of them took advantage of the noncombatant option available to East German draftees, the only Communist army with such an option. Thus, what exactly peace meant to

these Mennonites is a focus of his ongoing research.

Eased tensions made it possible for congregational leaders to travel and participate in European Mennonite conferences in the 1980s. Most of the church board and Pastor Hansen were at the 1984 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Strasbourg, France. Having members attend from a Communist country was an important state-

ment of Mennonite connections across the tensions of the Cold War.

Overlaid on this congregational history are important aspects

of international Mennonite history. Walter and Berta Jantzen kept a guest book the family has made available for research. It documents a constant flow of West European and North American Mennonites, as well as some from the Soviet Union, visiting the couple in East Berlin. A Dutch Mennonite congregation eventually set up a sister-church relationship with the East German congregation. The secret police kept close tabs on all these visitors as well.

## Working at connections

Mennonite Central Committee worked in Berlin after World War II aiding refugees. One of the artifacts Thiessen showed was a sack of MCC flour, labeled Moundridge and Elyria, Kan., that had been given to and preserved by a family in East Germany.

MCC and North American workers were located in West Berlin intermittently from the late 1960s until 1990 with assignments to connect with Mennonites and other Christians in East Germany. In addition, MCC at different times placed two workers directly in East Germany using student visas.

Perhaps the most dramatic MCC engagement with East Germany was when contacts there arranged a shipment of medical supplies to North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Thiessen found the telegram confirming arrival of the shipment in archives in Winnipeg, Man.

He also found that the doctor in East Berlin who made the shipment possible was working for the East German secret police.

The question of secret police influence on and interference with the Mennonite congregation is another key question Thiessen will be pursuing. The files kept by the state and the police are readily available in archives in Berlin.

During the May 23 presentation, listeners asked Thiessen what lessons those in the West might learn from this history. He noted the importance of listening to the stories of those who had been shaped by this different social context. Perhaps those life experiences also shaped what they bring to a congregation.

People in Western culture were socialized to be assertive and individualistic. In East Germany, there was more emphasis on the collective, on making room for others. That might also explain why people today need to ask to hear these stories. East Germans tend not to insist that their stories were important, while Westerners might be more eager to talk without prompting.

## Different perceptions

Westerners might think they know a lot about the East, but in fact most know little beyond simplistic stereotypes taken from the media. Thiessen found East Germans were glad to talk about their experiences.

An additional learning is that life for Mennonites in East Germany involved a lot of weighing where and how to cooperate with the government or not. Mennonites from the West who wanted to visit or operate there got drawn into the moral dilemmas as well.

Understanding radically different contexts and social expectations might help us think more carefully about our responses as Christians and Mennonites today. After 30 years, it seems time to ponder anew the lessons Mennonites in East Germany might have to teach us.

*Mark Jantzen is professor of history at Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., and served with Mennonite Central Committee in East Berlin from 1988 to 1991. He is author of The Wrong Side of the Wall: An American in East Berlin during the Peaceful Revolution. He took advantage of the online nature of the German Mennonite annual conference to attend Bernhard Thiessen's presentation on Mennonites in East Germany.*



Elsie Rempel

Bernhard Thiessen gives a presentation about Mennonites in East Germany last July at Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, Man.

East Berlin, and attendance was down to fewer than 20 people.

## Easing tensions

One commonality that emerged in this time between Mennonites and the Communist government was an emphasis on peace. The government line was that world communism would provide for world peace, since they claimed wars started out of capitalist drives for money, territory and resources, or out of capitalist desires to distract poor people from economic injustice by stirring up nationalism.

Walter Jantzen would welcome this governmental emphasis on peace as matching, in some sense, historic Mennonite positions. Yet the first generation of East German Mennonites had all participated in the German army in World War II. So far, Thiessen has been unable to document



John R. Friesen/Mennonite Heritage Archives

The board of the Mennonite congregation in East Germany gathers for a meeting around 1973.