

Seminary student writes biographies of MKC Ethiopian leaders

BY ISAIAH FRIESEN

The ISGA was pleased to have Workineh Ayele Yami, a leader in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia, as a teaching and research intern throughout the recently completed academic year. Workineh is a Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

After teaching a module on MKC history with Goshen College students in the “Anabaptism in Global Context” course, Workineh focused the second semester of his internship on writing the biographies of three MKC leaders for publication in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). The ISGA is a member of the management board of GAMEO and is committed to expanding content from Anabaptist groups outside of North America.

The Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia is the largest national conference within Mennonite World Conference, with more than 500,000 members. Kedir Delchume, Alemu Checole and Kiros Bihon were all prominent leaders in the MKC, but their stories had not yet been published in GAMEO. The choice to research these



Workineh Ayele Yami (*right*) and ISGA Director Elizabeth Miller (*left*) celebrated after Workineh's senior interview for his Master's in Theology and Peace Studies (MATPS) at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Workineh completed his MATPS internship with the ISGA in the 2023-24 academic year. PHOTO BY HENOK T. MEKONIN

three leaders was based on Workineh's personal connection to them, as well as the availability of primary sources like interviews, obituaries, and correspondence.

Workineh chose Alemu as a biography subject because of his connection with the global Anabaptist community. Alemu was blind and one of the first students enrolled in the school for the blind established by Haile Selassie I, where North American Mennonite missionaries were invited to teach.

“When you read that Alemu studied with the first Mennonites who went from Elkhart to Ethiopia, you will see

that we are kin,” said Workineh. “I wanted North Americans to feel the relational connection, to feel that we are really related to each other.”

Even though he had known Alemu personally, upon researching Alemu's story, Workineh was newly inspired to see the difference that education can make. “When teams of people came from the USA to Ethiopia, he was the one who translated sermons, workshops, even research interview transcripts between Amharic and English... you see the

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impact of education, how it transforms people. It's not a matter of physical blindness."

Kedir Delchume was known as a charismatic and ethical leader, inspiring people by the force of his moral example. Through his research and writing about Kedir, Workineh came to understand transformational leadership as a central aspect of Kedir's life and ministry.

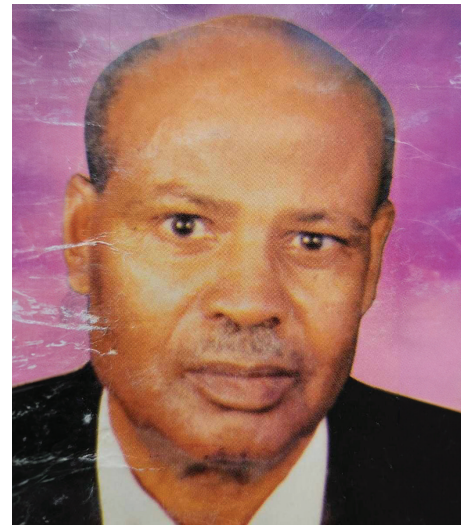
"Those who knew Kedir quote him as if they were quoting the Bible. People followed him not through some kind of manipulation, but through his example," Workineh said.

"In the time of persecution, especially, when everyone was leaving the country for the United States, he did not just want to leave the people there and flee away for himself. He said, 'If I die, I will die here, with the people, [rather than] go away for myself.' So that makes him a model."

About Kiros Bihon, Workineh learned from many who were direct witnesses to his humility, kindness, and other attributes. He heard from Kiros's daughter that he was a good manager, father, and husband. Workineh said that hearing the testimony about Kiros's life from his daughter and others "makes me feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. It humbles me when stories are being told like this."

Workineh hopes that these biographies will inspire and draw out readers' own gifts and potential. "For those who have this inner calling, when they hear this voice, they want to be like Kedir, to be like Alemu, or like Kiros," said Workineh. "If you have some kind of calling, then when you hear that [voice], you are being motivated by that."

The three biographies prepared by Workineh will be published in GAMEO in August of this year, accessible to readers worldwide. ✨



Workineh chose to feature **Kedir Delchume** as a biography subject, because of his example of transformational leadership within the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE FAMILY OF KEDIR DELCHUME

The ISGA was honored to co-host, with Mennonite Church USA Archives, the annual board meetings of the **Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online** on May 24. The ISGA is a member of the GAMEO management board. During the meeting proceedings, the board voted to accept and publish content for GAMEO in languages other than English, with the hope of encouraging greater global engagement.



PHOTO BY MARTIN GUNAWAN



PHOTO BY BERT FRIESEN

BiDA provides trustworthy sources for leadership development

BY ISAIAH FRIESEN

Resources from the Biblioteca Digital Anabautista (Digital Anabaptist Library-BiDA) are making an impact through an initiative of the Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church-IMH). The Academia de Liderazgo Misional Anabautista (Academy of Anabaptist Missional Leadership-ALMA) was founded in 2019 with the goal of responding to practical theological and leadership development needs in IMH. Sandra Montes-Martinez, director of ALMA, calls the self-guided learning platform a type of “first-aid kit” for leaders who want to explore a potential call to ministry.

ALMA has since developed four learning modules, which involve nearly 500 participants in the United States and around the world. Texts available in the BiDA form the core of the reading list for ALMA modules, said Montes-Martinez. The modules seek to develop and reinforce practical leadership skills among lay church members, including strengthening Anabaptist identity.

BiDA’s collection of Anabaptist writings, maintained by the ISGA at biblioana.org, has allowed ALMA to expose participants to a range of Anabaptist thought. Modules focused on the church in mission and “the church on the move” have especially made use of BiDA resources, Montes-Martinez said.

“BiDA has fulfilled an important

function for ALMA. BiDA gives us the confidence of having trustworthy sources that reinforce Anabaptist identity. The authors are people who have been immersed in Hispanic culture. And these resources help us in our [theological] vocabulary,” said Montes-Martinez.

Montes-Martinez noted an ongoing need for more Spanish-language resources specifically for Latino communities in the United States, who have different needs and experiences than Latin American churches. In the meantime, BiDA’s resources, including Spanish-language works written for North American or Latin American church audiences, play an important role in meeting the needs of Hispanic church communities. ✦

Community of Anabaptist Theological Institutions gather in Mexico

In February representatives of the participating members of the Comunidad de Instituciones Teológicas Anabautistas (Community of Anabaptist Theological Institutions-CITA) gathered in Mexico City, Mexico, for a theological consultation focused on the challenges and possibilities for theological education in Spanish-speaking communities throughout the Americas and Europe. The ISGA participates in CITA through its maintenance and support of the Biblioteca Digital Anabautista (Digital Anabaptist Library-BiDA).

Four plenary presentations shaped the agenda of the consultation, followed by reflection and discernment on priorities for CITA in the future. CITA is planning to publish a full report of the consultation, which will be made available in the BiDA. ✦



PHOTO BY ELEAZAR DIAZ ORTIZ



PHOTO BY SANDRA MONTES-MARTINEZ

Participants gathered in Mexico City for a theological consultation of the Comunidad de Instituciones Teológicas Anabautistas in February 2024.

Visiting scholar explores Ecuador connections

For three weeks this spring, the Mennonite Historical Library (MHL) was honored to host Julián Guamán as a Schafer-Friesen Research Fellow. Guamán is an indigenous Kichwa leader in the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (ICME, Ecuador Mennonite Christian Church) and a scholar of Latin American studies. Building on his PhD dissertation that proposed a typology of evangelicalism in Ecuador, Guamán is currently writing a more detailed history of Anabaptist groups in Ecuador.

“In Ecuador, Anabaptism is largely unknown both among evangelicals and

in society and academia in general,” stated Guamán. “[Yet] Anabaptists have been in the country since the 1940’s, first as collaborators in evangelical missionary societies and then as missionaries with their own mission agencies.”

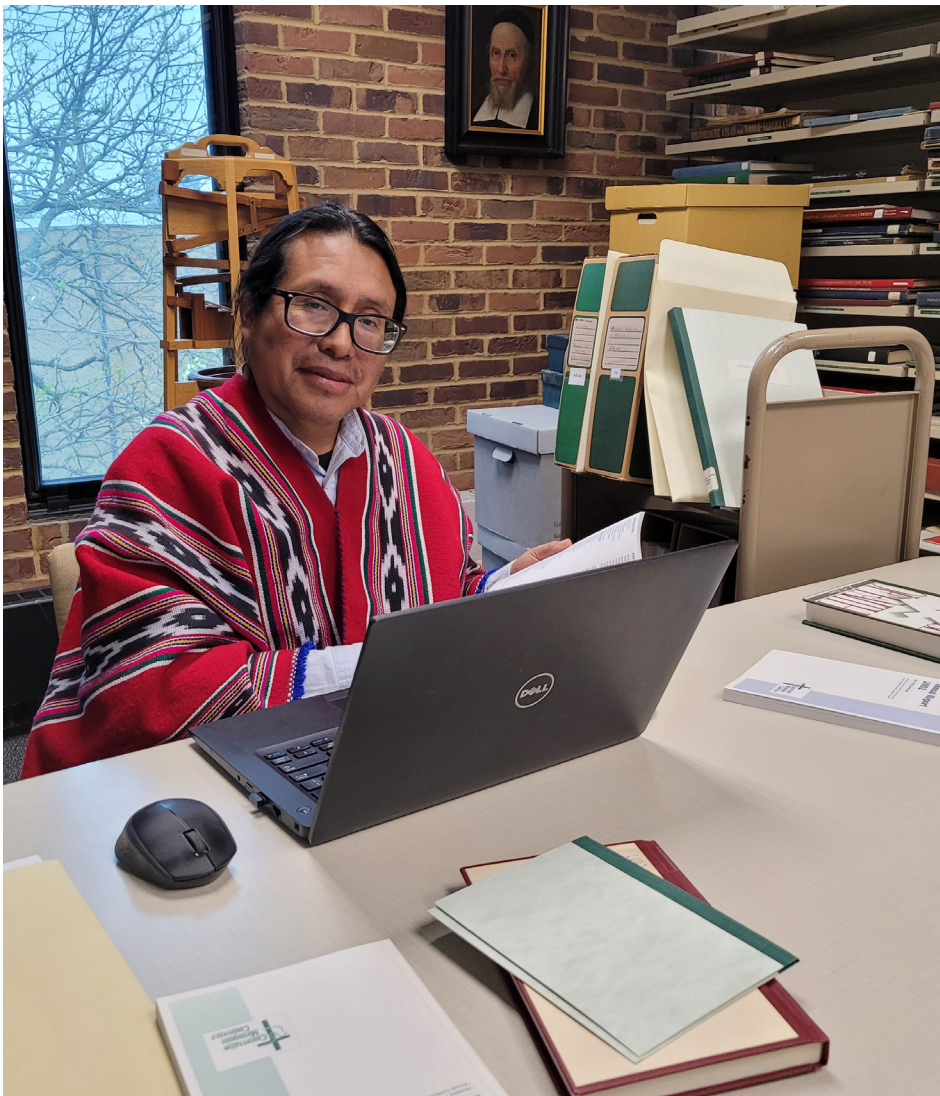
While the majority of sources Guamán has consulted for his project are located in Ecuador, he also needed access to North American mission documents and reports, some of which can be found in the MHL’s collection. “All of the research will be useful to me,” said Guamán, “but the surprise was the information from

the Evangelical Mennonite Conference in Canada.” In some of the periodicals of the EMC, Guamán encountered additional evidence of Mennonite participation in the mission societies of other evangelical groups. Guamán was also able to access five Ecuador-related interviews from the Jaime Prieto Interview Collection.

In addition, Guamán spent time researching at the Mennonite Church USA Archives in nearby Elkhart, Indiana. Guamán was particularly interested in locating correspondence from the early years of Mennonite Board of Mission involvement in Ecuador. Following his visit, Guamán will continue to analyze the research he collected with hopes of publishing his findings in 2025, in coordination with the 500-year commemoration of Anabaptism.

While a visitor on the Goshen College campus, Guamán graciously took time to share with various groups of faculty about the history of the indigenous Mennonite church conference and growing evangelical indigenous movements in Ecuador.

The costs of Guamán’s travels and expenses while in Goshen were covered by the Schafer-Friesen Research Fellowship. Made possible by an endowed gift from Geraldine Schafer Friesen and her husband, Dr. Abraham Friesen, the fellowship is awarded by the MHL to encourage use of its holdings, the world’s most comprehensive collection of Anabaptist, Mennonite, Amish and Hutterite printed materials. 🌿



Julián Guamán visited the Mennonite Historical Library for a few weeks of research this spring. Guamán is a Kichwa leader in the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (Christian Mennonite Church of Ecuador) and a scholar of Latin America studies.

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