Sharing a Vision of Shalom: MCC Guatemala as a Vehicle of Transformation

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The story of MCC Guatemala is one of transformative solidarity. Confronting devastating natural disasters and human violence of genocidal proportions, MCC emerged as a vehicle for a prophetic, global message of an Anabaptist theology forged in the fires of Guatemalan experiences. Initially focused on relief work and earthquake reconstruction, MCC rapidly expanded its program to include a development strategy based on Appropriate Technology (AT) to address the country's deep structural poverty. Long-term relationships with rural and Indigenous Guatemalans led MCC to develop a policy of accompaniment and reconciliation during years of state sponsored violence against civilians. These commitments to disaster relief, AT development, and solidarity facilitated a sophisticated awareness of the role of US foreign policy in the Guatemalan civil war, which became a catalyst for a 1984 conference, Desafío 84, where a comprehensive agenda of justice and a theological return to Anabaptism's original tenets emerged. Tasked with sharing this renewed Anabaptist vision with their North American constituents, MCC became a conduit through which the traditional flow of personnel, funds, and knowledge from north to south was fundamentally reversed. Its supranational structure gave MCC the ability to share stories of hope and struggle across the global Mennonite community.[1]

MCC arrived in Guatemala through Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), following the most destructive earthquake in Central American history on February 4, 1976. Centred just fifty-four kilometres from Guatemala City, the earthquake killed 22,545 people, injured 74,000, and displaced more than 1 million. Guatemala City's infrastructure was severely damaged, affecting the electrical grid, water supply, and telephone system. While wealthy Guatemalans kept appointments to have their dogs groomed and ordered the latest cocktail, known as the *terremoto* (earthquake), 50,000 people migrated to the capital. The homeless population, already at 300,000, surged to crisis proportions. The apparent lack of empathy on the part of the wealthy, as well as the earthquake's disproportionately destructive effect on the poor, caused some analysts to rename the tragedy a class-quake, exacerbating the pre-existing levels of poverty (estimated to be around 80 percent).[2]

The earthquake and subsequent relief efforts attracted hundreds of relief organizations from across the globe, with the majority representing evangelical Protestants from the United States. These groups saw in the disaster an opportunity to help rebuild Guatemala not only physically, but spiritually.[3] Utilizing a popular form of relief work known to its critics as disaster evangelism, these organizations frequently distributed aid according to the recipients' willingness to join a particular denomination.[4] Evangelists handed out food, set up medical clinics, rebuilt communities, and trained leaders to start churches.[5] While they had ostensibly come to provide physical relief, they simultaneously saturated the area with "scripture," a practice common among US relief groups throughout Latin America.[6] The dominance of this particular relief model prompted observers to coin the phrase *anima por lamina*, or souls for laminate roofing, a product commonly used in Guatemalan homes.[7] Their message also served to reinforce the existing inequitable socio-political structures because it did not address the root causes of poverty.

Mennonite Disaster Service arrived in Guatemala with a fundamentally different approach to relief work. Distinguishing themselves from other Protestant relief organizations, MDS implemented an educational approach within their relief response, an MCC model emphasizing helping people find solutions to their own problems.[8] Rather than recruiting foreign personnel, MDS employed hundreds of Guatemalans to rebuild their own homes. As a result, this approach developed long-term construction skills and relationships emerged between MDS personnel and Guatemalans. Committees were established in each reconstruction community to collect payments for the houses, which were sold at subsidized

prices, and re-invest the money into more community projects. In contrast to the victim-based approach which distributed material and aid, these arrangements required people to pay back the investments in their rebuilt homes. According to participants, this approach developed a sense of pride and accomplishment in addition to a sense of community among new neighbours.[9] Although the original plan had been to stay in Guatemala from six to nine months, MDS ultimately remained until the end of 1978 due to the immense structural needs and spent nearly $900,000 in reconstruction funds.[10]

MDS reports of the desperate socio-economic reality in Guatemala coalesced with a growing theological influence from the Global South that ultimately convinced MCC to establish a permanent presence in the nation. Disaster relief exposed MDS personnel to Guatemala's critical social and economic needs and they soon envisioned further work, reporting that "a natural disaster may be a good toe-hold for development activities; it forces change, people work together in new ways at a common need. This opens the way for a problem-solving/educational approach from the beginning."[11] Simultaneously, Mennonites in North America had been grappling theologically with questions of social justice and leftist politics since the 1960s and the success of the Cuban Revolution.[12] Theologians such as Anabaptist John Howard Yoder (now disgraced by his sexual misconduct towards dozens of women) spoke publicly of the gospel's undeniable political connotations, applying Christian categories of sin and salvation to social conflicts.[13] As an MCC executive secretary would later confirm,

> We have been called to think beyond particular conference, nation and culture to see ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ whose community is the world. Now we must think globally with the mind of Christ and see this world of need and conflict through the eyes of a brother in Rhodesia, a sister in the Philippines, a co-worker in the Soviet Union, a witness in Uruguay.[14]

The 1978 Mennonite World Conference highlighted these transnational theological transformations as it hosted Mennonites from the Global South whose voices confirmed that their experiences of poverty and injustice must become a priority. In the wake of the conference, MCC had begun to develop a stronger transnational presence throughout the Global South, whose economic disparity and violence played an increasingly pivotal role in their programming. It also established a permanent presence in Central America on June 26, 1978, in Guatemala City.

MCC extended the theoretical approach established by MDS, developing a model of operations that prioritized learning through lived experience. This particular approach facilitated a flexible and regionally specific program, or "field-driven philosophy." This characteristic, as Phil Fountain has argued, is pivotal to MCC's success in diverse cultures and socio-political contexts.[15] Their work was undergirded by a specific set of assumptions, a program centred within relationships, and the concept of *Zusammenarbeit*, or working together. The assumptions under which MCC operated offered a manifesto of human rights for all peoples that included the rights to health, food, shelter, employment, civil liberties, and knowledge of the abundant life that God offers. MCC's theological foundation held that God's order of things has a special place for the oppressed and dispossessed. These ideals were bound to one another through a commitment to a relationship-centred program undergirded by *Zusammenarbeit* between MCC workers and those with whom they served, rather than the hierarchal model prevalent within other evangelical relief organizations.

Along with all other NGOs, MCC was directly accountable to the National Reconstruction Committee (CNR), which was managed by the military state. As historian Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes, the Guatemalan state's objectives in assigning the military to oversee national reconstruction efforts were twofold. It safeguarded the economic and social interests of the powerful elite class during the reconstruction efforts while simultaneously controlling the mobilization of the progressive social and political movements.[16] This administrative structure placed MCC personnel into direct contact with a dangerous militarized state. As early as 1981, MCC reported threats to its personnel for its model of relational development work that challenged the stratified economic and racial hierarchies upon which the very core of the state's power rested.[17] MCC's conviction that they would not be brought into the selfish battle for power and wealth and would stand with those under threat directly contradicted the state's efforts to repress and control its population.[18] As AT promoter Jacob Schiere would report, "We cannot avoid contact with the government but we have avoided commitment to it and specifically to its unjust policies and practices. . . . The cost of taking a stand with the oppressed is high but we feel it is worth it."[19] Despite continuous threats to MCC and other NGOs operating in Guatemala throughout the 1980s, MCC personnel did not waver from their conviction to remain politically neutral and serve those most repressed.[20]

MCC's pedagogical approach was based on relationships, working together, and learning from one another. This defied the very

core of the socio-political structures the Guatemalan military government was attempting to protect. A small group of Spanish-speaking elites had maintained political and economic power since the colonial period. Well into the twentieth century, this economic system simultaneously mirrored and supported Guatemala's social stratification, which benefitted Spanish speakers identified as *ladinos* or *ladinas* and marginalized the majority Mayan Indigenous population as well as those of African descent, often through enforced labour drafts.[21] This historic monopoly, supported through violence, intensified in the decades following the US-supported overthrow of democratically elected Jacobo Árbenz in 1954 and the rise of a revolutionary movement during the 1960s.[22] The 1976 earthquake amplified the historic levels of profound poverty, racism, and socio-political fragmentation perpetuated upon the majority by an elite few.

Long-time MCC worker in Bolivia Jorge Reimer was given the task of transitioning MCC Guatemalan from a reconstruction organization to a full development program. Born in a Mexican Mennonite colony, Reimer had a deep knowledge of the Latin American Mennonite diaspora and established some of MCC's most significant pedagogical directions.[23] Six distinct Mennonite groups and eight Mennonite mission groups existed when Reimer assumed leadership of MCC Guatemala and he devoted much of his energy to developing both a service theology and an MCC presence amongst the various denominations.[24] Through these encounters, Reimer became concerned that the concept of serving one's neighbour was not highly developed and he concluded that "the Christian church with all of its imported theology and divisions does not have much to say to the society at large."[25] In order to navigate this complex intra-Mennonite terrain, MCC created a governing council consisting of representatives from every group or mission. MCC thereby sought to avoid the creation of separate and local church structures based on superficial and imported divisions.[26] The governing council addressed two fundamental challenges within Mennonite Guatemala. First, the foreign missions had brought their own theological divisions from the United States and Canada to Guatemala when they established missions and churches. This hampered the creation of a national Mennonite identity that could foster collaborative work. Second, this council defied the ethnic stratification embedded within Guatemalan society which privileged ladino/a over Indigenous Maya. This brought urban Spanish speakers and rural Indigenous Mennonites together to work equally alongside one another. Although this proved to be difficult for those ladinos/as socially conditioned to be in control, bridging these deep racial and cultural divides represented a critical theological element within MCC's work.

Reimer was responsible for MCC's most significant development initiative, whose approach sought to address Guatemala's structural poverty at its foundational level, namely the village. As Reimer succinctly stated, "one of the greatest tyrannies of poverty is the lack of access to technology choices," and he took up the challenge of designing technology that was both appropriate and affordable to poor Guatemalans.[27] The AT program became a tangible symbol of MCC's philosophy in promoting the belief that "God has created each person a worthy individual capable of directing their future and with a responsibility to live in service to those around.[28] This philosophy stressed stewardship, protection of natural resources, community, and the responsibility of humans in relation to nature, the neighbour and to God. It was a unique approach because it was directed at the very foundation of Guatemalan society, the village and women's labour. Most rural and Indigenous women report waking at 3 or 4 a.m. to start fires and make tortillas and often go to sleep around 11 p.m. The majority of their work is done by hand, from grinding corn to making tortillas and washing clothes at the river or public laundry.[29] Often at great personal risk, and travelling tirelessly through the rural conflict zones for ideas, Reimer employed his innovative genius in the creation of products such as the solar oven.[30] Designed to create higher heating temperatures in high altitudes without an excessive amount of firewood, these ovens along with labour-saving products such as water heaters and water and grain storage containers addressed the arduous labour burden of the poor, and particularly women.[31] The MCC personnel engaged in these projects brought crucial skills and funding with them but they also became transformed by their relationships with Spanish speaking, K'ekchi', Quiche, and Ixil Guatemalans. They struggled with cultural norms and promoting a sense of empowerment within communities historically disenfranchised by repressive and colonial governments.[32]

Through their work in rural communities, the AT program further advanced MCC's awareness of the historic economic repression experienced by rural and Indigenous Guatemalans. Employing the term often used by liberation theology movements, MCC believed that "development is the conscientization process by which people are awakened to opportunities within their reach. Development is people with an increased control over their destiny."[33] Their development model came to include the self-awareness of all people to their own full potential and their right to social justice. AT personnel became convinced that people must be allowed to actively participate within their own development, and not just as recipients of aid.[34] Evidence of this intensive engagement with local communities, both Spanish-speaking and Maya, emerged throughout the

1980s, particularly within the reports of Jacob Schiere, from the Netherlands. However, the AT philosophy of self-reliance and Christian engagement came into direct conflict with Guatemala's socio-political climate and the program personnel became the target of military attacks and death threats.[35] The entire program was forced to relocate to Guatemala City during 1981 because travel had become too dangerous for promoters. When General Efraín Ríos Montt became president in 1982, the program in the Department of Chimaltenango was suspended as the region became the central conflict zone between the guerrillas and the army.[36]

Along with the AT program, MCC's entire programmatic direction and ideology were fundamentally changed with the escalation of the civil war and the eighteen-month presidency of Ríos Montt. By early 1982, disparate revolutionary movements had coalesced into the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity or URNG, strengthening the revolutionary movement and uniting both ladino/a and Indigenous guerrillas. In March, General Efraín Ríos Montt staged a coup d'etat, assumed the presidency, launching an eighteen-month period that became known as *la violencia*. While those within the capital city experienced a reprieve from the unpredictable violence and terror, the rural civilian and mostly Indigenous populations became the new targets of violence on an almost unimaginable scale. Declaring, "The guerrilla is the fish. The people are the sea. If you cannot catch the fish, you have to drain the sea," Ríos Montt escalated a scorched-earth policy against civilian populations he perceived to be supporting the guerrilla revolutionary groups.[37] His first month in office stands alone as the deadliest month of the entire civil war, with the murder of 3,330 people at the hands of their own government.[38] In what became horrifyingly routine, men would be rounded up in villages, tortured, and killed in front of their families, sometimes burned alive in churches. Women and children were raped before being killed, while their babies were thrown into the air and caught on the ends of swords or thrown against rocks.[39] Those fortunate to escape the massacres fared little better as they were forced to wander the mountains often for days with little or no food and water.[40]

MCC directors Rich and Martha Sider, who followed Jorge Reimer and shared his vision of service, became particularly instrumental in developing the accompaniment element of MCC's work during *la violencia*. Forging relationships with a wide variety of religious groups and peasant organizations, as well as those within the military state, Sider shared MCC's vision of non-violent witness, prophetic critique against the social structures, and discipleship.[41] While he maintained MCC's autonomy, Sider made contacts with the

popular church movement (Catholic) and the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), which became critical in their support of Indigenous people fleeing the violence and death squads.[42] As MCC personnel bore witnesses to this genocidal violence, it became apparent that Indigenous Mayans were disproportionately targeted by military death squads. Advocating on behalf of Indigenous Guatemalans with government officials, MCC personnel and Guatemalan Mennonites were brought into direct danger with the state and much of their work had to be done discreetly.[43] Its identity as a transnational organization gave MCC the ability to transmit the truth about what was happening and they passed on accurate information throughout this period, often bringing Guatemalan speakers to the United States and Canada and helping to develop solidarity networks while both the United States and the Guatemalan governments continued to deny all complicity.[44]

By mid-1982, more than 400,000 people had fled the rural violence into the capital city. This migration intensified the crisis of internally displaced people already at a critical peak due to the earthquake's physical destruction. In response, MCC in collaboration with the urban Mennonite church of Casa Horeb developed several service programs and created a committee designed to assist at least some of the many refugees.[45] The Comité Pro Ayuda a Desplazados, or Committee for the Support of Displaced Persons, became a conduit within a vast regional network comprised of Mennonites, Catholics, Presbyterians, and other civilians through which many Guatemalans often reached safety in Canada, Mexico, or the United States. Members of this committee were directly responsible for saving the lives of hundreds under direct threat by the army or paramilitary. Among the many people they hid and helped to safely escape the military death squads was Rigoberta Menchú Tum, whose eyewitness account of the atrocities, *I, Rigoberta Menchú,* shattered the global silence.[46] Menchú Tum was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with exiled Indigenous communities in 1992.[47]

Ríos Montt's theological position to justify his genocidal actions created a crisis for Guatemalan Mennonites directly working with MCC because, like the dictator, many of them identified as evangelicals.[48] Moving away from the familiar Cold War analogies embedded in and integral to the Cold War anti-communist rhetoric used by Central American states against revolutionary movements, Ríos Montt reframed the political discourse and transformed it into a religious-nationalistic one, urging one and all to bring in a New Guatemala.[49] Positioning himself as a messenger from God, Ríos Montt preached that Guatemala could be saved through the redemption of

the individual. As Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes in her analysis of the era, Ríos Montt told Guatemalans that their country suffered from three fundamental problems: a national lack of responsibility and respect for authority, an absolute lack of morality, and an inchoate sense of national identity.[50] Ríos Montt preached that Guatemala could be saved through the redemption of the individual and urged every person to search their soul and take personal responsibility for their immoral behavior. Ethnographer Kevin Lewis O'Neill summarizes the significance of Ríos Montt's rhetoric in this way:

> When the fog of war and genocide's gray zone began to make the civil conflict difficult to assess, the narrative offered two clear-cut sides: God and Satan. And when many felt all but powerless, this discourse placed the means for change in urban believers' hands or, more accurately, between their inter-woven fingers: prayer.[51]

This eschatological "end of days" theology was spread through his weekly Sunday "evening sermons." This message resonated with many evangelicals, Mennonites among them. As a result, Ríos Montt enjoyed strong support within a constituency unwilling to confront his genocidal actions.

With socio-political violence spreading across the Central American isthmus, Guatemalans were not alone in facing these profound theological questions. Since the 1960s, definable revolutionary movements had emerged in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador to address profound levels of poverty and socio-economic inequities.[52] The Nicaraguan Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, (FSLN) successfully overthrew the forty-year rule of the Somoza family in 1979 thereby re-energizing the revolutionary movements in both Guatemala and El Salvador. Determined to contain the potential hope and power of these movements, the United States funded military dictatorships throughout Central America and framed these struggles for self-determination and social reform as a battle against communism within a bipolar Cold War worldview.[53] Central American Mennonites and MCC had already held several meetings to discuss their political reality and its theological implications. During meetings held in 1981, attendees searched for connections between the poverty, injustice, and violence within an Anabaptist theological framework. The meetings "brought into focus the need to interpret the relationship between church and state from an Anabaptist perspective in the context of a region brought into turmoil by . . . the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, military repression in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala."[54] The meeting concluded without a definitive conclusion on just how Mennonites

were supposed to respond to revolutionary movements and state violence.

Reports from MCC's eyewitnesses had already reached its North American constituents, and in October 1983 MCC and several Mennonite mission boards held another symposium to determine their response. Central Americans in attendance challenged the North Americans to reflect theologically on the conflicts they were facing, imploring them to develop a strategy for mission and service within their congregations. However, an answer to this urgent question of how to apply North American theology to the war zones of Central America remained elusive.[55]

The escalation of socio-political violence across the region led to a pivotal gathering in Antigua, Guatemala, in 1984. With the goal of supporting their congregations and broader communities under threat, attendees of Desafío 84 (Challenge 84) posed a simple question: What would the kingdom of Christ look like during this time of crisis?[56] Nicaraguan MCC delegate Gerald Schlabach identified their predicament within a transnational Mennonite mileu. He argued that North American theology (or in his words, First World theology) promoted the idea that God will protect faithful Christians from hardship with prosperity as a sign of God's blessings whereas the Bible was written from the perspective of people experiencing poverty and oppression. This was a story intended to bring comfort and hope to the innocent victims of greedy oppressors. In response to these scenarios, he noted that Mennonites had historically favoured non-resistance over non-violent confrontation in part because they had the resources to flee. However, Central American Mennonites did not have the option to leave. Therefore, a new theology was needed, one forged in the fires of *la violencia*.[57]

The delegates concluded that, facing the simultaneous crises across Central America, they must reconsider their concept of peace as the absence of war to include a fundamental restructuring of society.[58] Quite simply, they agreed that they could no longer remain silent. They discovered deep commonalities between their own Central American socio-political context and that of the Reformation era and the emergence of Anabaptism. The complicity between church and state in that era, the economic disparities, and the destructive results of war, including the Peasants' War of 1524–1526, in which 200,000 peasants died, all resonated with the contemporary Central American context and represented a starting point for their theological journey. Their analysis held scripture at its centre, which brought them to the conclusion that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. As MCC director Rich Sider noted, "at central points of revelation history, God also acted to liberate the poor and

oppressed; God acts in history to exalt the poor and oppressed . . . ; and God's people, if they are truly God's people, must remain on the side of the poor and oppressed."[59] Those in attendance came to one unmistakable conclusion: Central American Anabaptist theology needed to develop from open dialogue amongst themselves to address the socio-political realities of their region.[60]

The implications of this theological transformation were radical and profound. The theology developed during Desafío 84 enabled Mennonites to put ideological convictions of justice and equality into practice. This new perspective redefined violence from warfare to include systematic institutional forms such as intense poverty, hunger, illiteracy, racism, and social inequality. Believing that the Christ of the gospels called for the church to enact a just socio-economic order for all people, they called upon all Mennonites to critique those states actively working against this just order.[61] The emergent vision of shalom had significant implications for the Guatemalan Mennonite community. Many urban Mennonites had adopted a political neutrality supporting neither the state nor the revolutionary movements in the hopes of avoiding becoming a target of political violence or because they had a family member in the military.[62] The Desafío 84 conclusions challenged this neutrality, claiming that silence had been perceived as tacit support for the state. The new vision of shalom now called for direct non-violent political and social engagement. Despite the risks, Desafío 84 participants urged all Central American Mennonites to live as non-violent witnesses to the militarized societies in which they found themselves. Since the Indigenous Maya communities had been the primary targets of violence during the Ríos Montt era, MCC's call to bear witness to the violence challenged the racialized social chasm between them and urban ladino/as. Despite the massacres and reported disappearance of more than four hundred villages, many continued to believe the government's denials. Following the Desafío 84 declarations some within the urban Mennonite community embraced the vision of shalom which included identifying the historic racism towards Indigenous Guatemalans which was now being used to justify state violence. They employed their social and economic privilege in order to bear witness to the atrocities in their midst.

For rural Mennonites and those in conflict zones the practical implications of this vision of shalom were far more complicated.[63] Since the mid-1970s, the state had created civil defense patrols which formed an integral extension of the military apparatus into rural villages. By the late 1980s, more than one million men and boys were forced to participate in civil patrols and policing and

sometimes killing members of their own communities. This severed communal ties and traumatized all involved. In the conflict zones taking a non-violent stance was potentially life-threatening; many Mennonite Mayans opted to practice their faith in less politically visible ways.[64]

Desafío 84 also became a clarion call to the North American Mennonite community to question their privileged position. For theologian John Paul Lederach, who attended the meeting, Desafío 84 caused a shift in his fundamental perspective on the global Mennonite community.[65] Arguing that each community possessed the power and resources to move towards wholeness, or in the words of Guatemalan Anabaptists, a vision of shalom in all elements of their life, MCC personnel now believed that the traditional north–south flow of authority must be modified to one of accompaniment and solidarity. As MCC personnel would later conclude during the 1990s, "it is impossible for us, as North Americans, to discern on our own what course we must take in our peacemaking efforts. We need the voice of the poor and oppressed, just as they need ours." [66] In turn, Guatemalan Mennonites became living reminders of the strength and prophetic witness of the earliest Anabaptist movement for the North American Mennonite community.[67] As Arnold Snyder would later point out, Central Americans were asking North Americans whether they were ready to participate rather than sitting on the sidelines. He continued,

> Jesus Christ was not a passive escapist: rather he actively but non-violently confronted the injustices of the day. Have we in North America also searched the Scriptures diligently in this matter of the exportation of misery, starvation, armaments and invasion? Have we honestly understood the meaning and the challenge of Christ's life and example? Are we following after Christ in all things, or have we been seduced by a life of ease, wealth and conformity?[68]

Identifying the complicity of the Canadian and US governments in the Central American crises, Desafío 84 challenged North American Mennonites to follow this new prophetic vision of shalom. As attendee Mark Chupp noted, "reverse mission was a concept referred to often: Mennonites would take the story back to the United States in an effort to promote First-World changes that would positively affect Central America."[69] MCC was identified as the vehicle through which this theological transformation could be transmitted to their North American constituency.

This constituency, however, was largely enthralled with Ronald Reagan's narrative of the Christian Guatemalan government confronting Russian-backed communists. In the face of growing

credible reports by powerful institutions such as the Catholic Church and other NGOs of the extraordinary levels of violence being perpetrated against civilians with the support of US funding, a 1983 sub-committee hearing was held in the US Senate. Eager to discredit this reality and to justify the millions of taxpayer dollars being spent in Central America, its purpose was to investigate the influence of Catholic liberation theology and by implication other Christian movements on the spread of revolutionary movements and resistance to US economic imperialism in Central America.[70] These hearings, however, only allowed witnesses who supported Reagan's rhetoric that any Christian critique of the Guatemalan state and US financial support represented evidence of their communist affiliations.[71] In 1991, Guatemalan defense minister General Héctor Alejandro Gramajo bragged, "You needn't kill everyone to complete the job. . . . We instituted Civil Affairs [in 1982] which provides development for 70 percent of the population, while we kill 30 percent,"[72] but even such an admission failed to shift the association between Christian political critiques of the state and communism, which continued to hold strong among US constituents.[73]

To address this issue, MCC adopted a strategy of storytelling to educate North American churches and navigate the complex Cold War terrain. Understanding that any critique of specific political positions could be both dangerous to their Central American partners and could play into Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric, they concluded that "the focus of our community will be on the reality of suffering and poverty in the region and the historical causes for it rather than strong criticism or praise for any particular governments in the region."[74] Guatemalans and Central Americans came to the US and Canada on speaking tours, sharing stories about the violence as well as their Anabaptist theological formation forged during Desafío 84. These testimonials cut through the Cold War binary of capitalism versus communism, provided a counter to the deeply entrenched Cold War propaganda, and created an awareness of the complicity of US foreign policy, and by implication North American Mennonites, with Central America's violence. MCC also employed this same technique to strengthen its NGO presence in Washington, DC, with those directly responsible for making foreign policy.

For the MCC program, the vision of shalom confirmed its commitment to serve as a transnational vehicle, affirming that

> the links between North and South are critical components in both the problems and solutions we encounter. In fact, we see the most serious geo-political struggle to be North against South rather than East against West. We need to be converted by our experience in the South and allow our brothers and sisters there to witness to us. No longer should the flow

> of resources, ideas or faith be only from the North to the South, but we must learn to receive especially faith and ideas from the South. It is there where the church is suffering and growing, where faithfulness can be most powerfully observed.[75]

Later MCC programs would emphasize transnational actions and impacts by emphasizing complicity in a world system that negatively affected the people of Guatemala.[76] Activities formerly considered as belonging to the "peace portfolio" were integrated into the plans and activities of MCC and national Mennonite church programs, with the hope that a vision of shalom would become integral to the church's mission.

By the 1990s, the education of their North American partners had become a critical element of MCC planning across the region. Learning teams and delegations from the United States and Canada came to Guatemala to learn about the war and historic reasons for pervasive poverty, including the complex intersection between embedded social patriarchy, sexism, and racism. MCC supported the seminary program Central American Study and Service (CASAS), which since 1990 promoted integrated learning of culture, history, and Spanish language for university students. All of these activities were undertaken with belief in the necessity of "a mutual sharing of gifts, faith, and knowledge, recognizing that the world community is increasingly inter-connected and that change must happen in both the north and the south if there is to be hope for a more just and peaceful hemisphere."[77] The CASAS program facilitated broader MCC goals of shifting the directional flow of authority and knowledge. Based on the assumption that North Americans needed the perspectives of the Global South, the CASAS program offered North Americans the possibility of viewing the world through the eyes of the poor and marginalized by building mutual relationships and developing a Christian responsibility of justice.[78]

The 1996 Peace Accords signalled the official end to the URNG–state conflict, but little changed for Guatemalans. In the following years MCC's approach of being a transnational conduit of accurate information and relationship-building became even more significant. Employing its vision of shalom to address the post-accords period, MCC institutionalized programs developed during the 1980s directed at social violence, illiteracy, unemployment, climate change, continued state repression, and mental and physical health. The socio-economic crises that had initially sparked the thirty-six-year war remained unchanged. The military elite were still in power, land reform had not occurred, and the underlying endemic poverty and corruption amongst the elite remained rampant. In

addition, the entire country had now been traumatized by decades of extreme violence and particularly by sexualized violence against women and children. The social violence that escalated in the post–peace accords era devastated the social fabric. In 1994, Mario Higueros, dean of the Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala City (Seminario Anabautista Latinoamericano), referred to this situation as "social decomposition."[79] Gender-based violence during the war had reached astounding proportions, and its impact continued to reverberate within post-war society. By the early 2000s, Guatemala was experiencing what scholars and activists were calling a femicide, with the inexplicable murders of thousands of women every year.[80] By the mid-2006, the daily death toll surpassed that of the civil war and MCC reported an average of fifteen deaths per day.[81] However, state officials perceived this social decomposition to be apolitical, since the violence was no longer directed at the state, neither jeopardizing nor challenging its power.[82]

In the face of continued violence, Guatemalans looked to peace and conflict resolution strategies such as those offered by Menopaz (Menno Peace, 1996), which later became RedPaz or Peace Networks (1998). Born from a series of regional meetings among Anabaptist church leaders during the mid-1990s, RedPaz promoted more than an end to social and political violence. It also pursued the creation of safe spaces in which those affected could heal from social trauma and identify the internal pain and injury caused by decades of violence.[83] MCC supported the publication of materials, education for Anabaptist leaders and theologians, and encouraged the development of a service culture within Guatemalan Mennonite congregations. Along with Mennonite congregations, MCC began to actively confront the deep-rooted patriarchy and sexism which had facilitated the horrors of gendered violence by creating educational materials to develop a biblical position and a theological response.[84]

The economic instability created by the hemispheric threat of neoliberalism galvanized MCC into a new educational direction. The Washington Consensus policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank emphasized a redirection of public spending on subsidies and privatization of state enterprises. These structural adjustment policies devastated Guatemala's fragile economy and impoverished its population while threatening food security and access to healthcare and education.[85] An MCC analysis stated: "The role of the U.S. government in all of this is disconcerting. The United States has had a very active and aggressive economic interest in Guatemalan affairs. Over 400 U.S. companies operate here and yet Guatemala's situation is unknown in the U.S. MCC is concerned that . . . news censorship is directly related to

economic interests."[86] In response, Mennonites with the support of MCC held a series of regional congresses on globalization during 2002 and 2003. Tying together concepts of peace, justice and community, Mennonite leaders called for the "globalization of dignity." Speaking at one of these conferences, Mario Higueros played on the concept of globalization, calling for a globalization of sharing, an inclusive market rather than an exclusive market, and unconditional global liberty.[87] Along with Higueros, other congress participants advocated against globalization and economic inequality, introducing their vision of shalom which would bring economic stability as well as social safety at the communal level.[88] In their concluding statement, congress members insisted that the faith community must address the injustices of the globalization.[89] MCC and Central American Mennonites concluded that the answer lay in solidarity, not only regionally but south and north as well.

MCC-Guatemala merged with MCC-El Salvador in 2006 and continued to work with people experiencing intense levels of poverty, societal violence fed by gang activity and drug cartels, high unemployment, and governmental corruption. MCC's programming reflects their continued emphasis on solidarity through music therapy programs and educational tours related to unemployment, immigration, and the abuses of land and people by foreign mining companies. It supports Casa del Migrante (House of Migrants) as well as funding Guatemalans to go abroad for educational opportunities. MCC continues to share a vision of shalom forged by *la violencia*, transformed by hope and solidarity, always sharing stories and inviting all to join in their journey of transformation.

Conclusion

MCC's commitment to disaster relief, AT development, and solidarity in the midst of violence led to the emergence of an Anabaptist agenda of justice and a new vision of shalom. This programmatic model placed MCC into direct conflict with an entrenched socio-economic political system designed to impoverish the majority of Guatemalans. Navigating a politically precarious terrain, MCC and its Guatemalan Mennonite partners identified the lessons of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as the key to a profound theological transformation. The agency redefined peace not as the absence of violence but as an active peace-making stance in all elements of life. MCC became the vehicle through which this vision was transmitted to the global Mennonite community, reversing the traditional flow of personnel and knowledge. This south to north trajectory encouraged the

transformation of personnel from being the experts and dispensers of monies and expertise, and by association, power and privilege, to learners and accompaniers, aligning themselves in solidarity with those they served. This disruptive model also functioned within Guatemala to bridge historic racial and class lines. Shifting the structure from a hierarchical one to a dialogical relationship, in Guatemala MCC continuously reflected on its power and privilege while engaging with and learning from Guatemalans.

Notes

1 My perspective on MCC has shifted over years of research due to the new availability of primary sources too sensitive to be distributed during the civil war. This paper focuses primarily on the years between 1976 and 2010.

2 Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991),124.

3 Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "A History of Protestantism in Guatemala" (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1986), 194.

4 Although the topic of Protestant conversion is beyond the scope of this paper, the post-earthquake period is characterized by the emergence of hundreds of small evangelical Protestant churches. By the late 1980s, there were more than 400 distinct evangelical groups in Guatemala City alone. For further information see David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993); Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, eds., *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); and Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

5 Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 11.

6 Garrard-Burnett, "History of Protestantism in Guatemala," 197. As a result, evangelical church membership rose by 14 percent following the earthquake. By 1982, growth rates were more than 23 percent per year.

7 Garrard-Burnett, "History of Protestantism in Guatemala," 194.

8 They quickly organized a team of administrators and began to send groups of ten to Guatemala. More than 51 people represented the United States, Canada, Belize, Mexico, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Honduras. Less than one month after the earthquake the first house had been built. They focused on two primary locations, one on the edge of Guatemala City and the other in Patzicía, Chimaltenango (just sixty-six kilometres outside of the capital, and dominated by Kaqchikel Maya), a community where 1,200 people had died out of a total of 7,000.

9 This is based on conversations I have had with those involved in the work and is a sentiment scattered throughout the MCC documents. This approach was also very challenging at times and community leaders experienced conflicts with those unwilling to pay back their loans or unhappy with the overall

approach. However, the successes far outweighed these difficulties as recipients began to understand MCC's approach.

[10] The reconstruction effort was impressive, with a total of 1,937 houses built.

[11] Mennonite Central Committee Archives, Akron, PA (hereafter MCCA), Guatemala Annual Report, 1977, 89.

[12] David C. Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 72-73.

[13] Kirkpatrick, *Gospel*, 72–73. For further information on John Howard Yoder, see Rachel Waltner Goosen's "'Defanging the Beast:' Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 7–80.

[14] MCCA, The Report of the Executive Secretary, Jan. 25–27, 1979, 1.

[15] Philip Fountain, "Translating Service: An Ethnography of the Mennonite Central Committee" (PhD diss, Australian National University, 2011), 103.

[16] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Under God's Thumb," in *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America*, ed. Jürgen Buchenau and Lyman L. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 165.

[17] Reports of conflict with the CNR continued throughout 1984 and 1986.

[18] MCCA, Rich Sider, "A Climate of Fear," Guatemala Activity Report, n.d., 3–4.

[19] MCCA, A report by Herman Bontrager, Jan. 10, 1984.

[20] Henry and Mildred Yoder's reports on their work make frequent mention of veiled and overt threats to MCC and other NGOs from the CNR. In "Under God's Thumb," Garrard-Burnett reports that the CNR assumed the paradoxical role of coordinating government relief to communities that had been destroyed by the government's own counterinsurgency campaigns during the early 1980s.

[21] Following the Conquest in 1524, Spanish conquistadors established large plantations and forced the Mayan Indigenous peoples to work the land as both free and unfree forced labour. The Spanish also introduced an African slave labour force which contributed to a diverse, multi-ethnic, highly stratified society that entrenched the socio-economic privilege of a small group Spanish-speaking non-Indigenous elite. Until the 1944 revolution, the political realm was dominated by a series of liberal dictatorships that had little interest in the social well-being of its population, once again mandating enforced labour drafts known as the *mandamiento* for the Indigenous Maya population.

[22] A decade of democratic reforms occurred between 1944 and 1954 which threatened the economic supremacy of the US-owned United Fruit Company and the national economic and political hierarchy. In response to the intervention in 1954, a revolutionary movement emerged during the early 1960s but had been largely suppressed by the mid-1970s. A simmering civil war was essentially reignited by the 1976 earthquake, which led to a societal realignment of labour unions, peasant organizations, and armed guerrilla groups, breaking a fragile status quo with the military. US foreign policy during the 1980s continued its history of intervention within Central America. A complete survey of US foreign policy is beyond the scope of this paper. For more details see John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade, Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*, 5th ed.

(Boulder: Westview Press, 2010); Tom Barry, *Roots of Rebellion: Land and Hunger in Central America* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Phillip Berryman, *Inside Central America: The Essential Facts Past and Present on El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica* (Pantheon Books, 2013); Kenneth M. Coleman, George C. Herring, eds., *Understanding the Central American Crisis: Sources of Conflict, U.S. Policy, and Options for Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1991); and Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

[23] Although each of the MCC directors deserve a full biography for their contributions to Guatemala and Central America, this is beyond the purview of this survey. Jorge (George) Reimer was director between 1978 and 1980, Rich and Martha Sider served from 1980 until 1985, Henry and Mildred Yoder from 1986 through 1989, Nathan and Elaine Zook-Barge from 1989 through 1998, and Scott and Rhoda Jantzi from 1998 through 2003, at which time Antony Sanchez and Irma Judith Solano assumed directorship.

[24] As Phil Fountain argues in his dissertation, MCC's directions are highly influenced by specific individuals at particular moments. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jorge Reimer and Rich Sider played outsized roles in establishing the theological and practical direction for MCC Guatemala.

[25] MCCA, Guatemala Quarterly Report, May 4, 1979, 2–3.

[26] MCCA, Guatemala Integrated Rural Development Program, 1978, 25.

[27] MCCA, George Reimer, Country Representative Report, 1979, 3, 6. Reimer noted that two pieces of firewood sold for a penny in Chimaltenango sold for a penny a few years prior; in 1978 four pieces cost five cents, and in 1979 three pieces of wood cost ten cents.

[28] MCCA, Rich Sider, "Country Representative Report," Feb. 1981, 4.

[29] This reality has been shared through many conversations with Guatemalans.

[30] By 1982, more than 300 clay stoves had been made. Each stove saved about $100 per year on firewood, not to mention the health and labour-saving benefits for rural women.

[31] MCCA, Guatemala Annual Report, 1990, 106. By 1988, the AT program had contacts with more than 100 communities, promoting more than 30 products.

[32] MCC contains reports from those involved in the AT program but does not hold specific details about interactions between personnel and AT recipients. The entire AT program was sold in 1990.

[33] MCCA, AT program report, 4.

[34] MCCA, Quarterly Report, Apr. 22, 1986, 2.

[35] The first targets in the countryside were community activists, and particularly Catholic lay leaders such as catechists, who died by the hundreds during the 1970s. When the CUC (Committee for Peasant Unity) first began organizing in the countryside in the early 1970s more than 300,000 rural peasants left the Guatemalan altiplano every year to work on plantations on the Pacific coast to supplement their minuscule earnings. The CUC was the first Indigenous-led national labour organization and the first to unite ladino workers and Indigenous farmers in a struggle for better working conditions.

[36] One of the most devastating moments for the program came in 1986 when Don Manual Guaran, a promoter for six years, was assassinated.

[37] For further information see David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[38] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982–1983* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89.

[39] I first heard these reports from human rights lawyers and refugees fleeing Guatemala in the mid-1980s while travelling in Chiapas and Mexico City, and again while visiting refugee camps in Chiapas in 1992. Since that time, these abuses have been systematically documented. See Victor Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1987); Robert M. Carmack, ed., *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemala Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Ricardo Falla, *Massacres in the Jungle: Ixcán, Guatemala, 1975–1982* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala, *Guatemala: Never Again* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); *Victoria* Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[40] Precise figures on the number of internal and external refugees have been difficult to determine. The most accepted numbers are that more than one million Guatemalans were internally displaced, and approximately a quarter of a million refugees fled to Mexico and Belize, although during the height of the conflict workers for the UN High Commission on Refugees feared that upwards of two million Guatemalans were living along the Mexico-Guatemalan border.

[41] Rich Sider became the regional director for MCC in Latin America following the end of the Siders' MCC term in Guatemala and he continued to promote his deep commitment to MCC's non-violent and Anabaptist vision of shalom.

[42] The precise details of these contacts are not available. The Committee for Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina) was launched on April 15, 1978, and was described by its founder Pablo Ceto as a convergence of the leftist insurgency and the Indigenous peoples' movements. Though it was a distinct organization, it had close ties to the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor), both groups drawing upon the discontent with the government for widespread support. The 1976 earthquake, which led to extensive damage in the highlands, also opened up a space for the CUC's activities.

[43] MCC did not document their contacts and networks, to protect Guatemalan civilians, a practice employed by all Guatemalans whose work placed them into direct conflict with the military government.

[44] For more information on the risks both MCC personnel and Guatemalan Mennonites took to confront the state over its genocidal violence within Indigenous regions, see Patricia Harms, "Stumbling Our Way to the Mark: Guatemalan Mennonites in the Era of Ríos Montt, 1980–1984," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 32 (2014): 115–38.

[45] MCCA, Quarterly Report, Feb.–Apr. 1981, 3.

[46] Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London: Verso, 1984). Many of those involved with this work eventually were themselves forced into exile. Such was the case with Mario Higueros and his family, who following their support of Rigoberta were forced into exile in Spain, remaining there for the next five years.

[47] There have been attempts by scholars and the Guatemalan government to discredit this work. However, as their own documents would later confirm, testimonies such as Rigoberta's were all too true. See Greg Grandin, *Who is Rigoberta Menchú?* (London: Verso, 2011) for the definitive response to this controversy.

[48] Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 10. The extent of his powerful rhetoric concerning personal responsibility and morality and his denial of culpability over the military's excessive violence became clear throughout the following decades. Following his overthrow in August 1983, his influence continued as his political surrogates won the presidential elections in 1990, 1995, and 1999. Although he was constitutionally barred from running for the presidential office, Ríos Montt gained a seat in Congress in 2007, which he held until 2012, representing the Guatemalan Republican Front (Frente Republicano Guatemalteco), a party he formed.

[49] Ríos Montt's religious ideology did not develop in a vacuum but within a small group of *evangelicos* who met to discuss theology and more importantly how to convert the Guatemalan nation to their particular brand of Christianity.

[50] Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit,* 64.

[51] Kevin Lewis O'Neill, *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 25.

[52] "Centroamérica Desafía a la Iglesia," special issue, *Esperanza en Camino*, no. 1 (Sept. 1986): 7. The vast majority of Central Americans remained in poverty, with 71 percent of Honduran households in poverty and 31 percent in extreme poverty.

[53] The low-intensity conflict created violence and fear within the civilian population, specifically targeting teachers, medical personnel, and literacy workers. As well as funding Guatemala, the US was funding the Salvadoran state at a rate of $1 million per day and supported a covert war against the FSLN in Nicaragua. By the end of these conflicts, more than 250,000 Guatemalans, more than 75,000 Salvadorans, and more than 70,000 Nicaraguans had died, although most agree that these numbers are actually far higher

[54] Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration: A Global Mennonite History* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2010), 325.

[55] MCCA, *Guatemala Desafio*, MCC, June 4, 1984.

[56] MCCA, *Guatemala Desafío*, 1.

[57] Gerald Schlabach, "Identification with the People in a Revolutionary Situation," MCC Occasional Paper no. 2, May 1988, 6.

[58] "Centroamérica Desafía a la Iglesia," 43.

[59] Ronald Sider, "Mennonites and the Poor: Toward an Anabaptist Theology of Liberation," in *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective*, ed. Daniel S. Schipani (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 88.

[60] Gilberto Flores, "A Third Way," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, suppl. (Aug. 1984): 399–409, 404.

[61] Gerald Schlabach, "Una Perspectiva Profética para Centroamérica," in "Centroamérica Desafía a la Iglesia," 33.

[62] MCCA, a report entitled "Guatemala," n.d.

[63] There was considerable tension between MCC Guatemala and the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions based in the Alta Verapaz region. Although that element of MCC's experience in Guatemala is too complex to discuss in this

paper, the theological decisions made during the Desafío 84 meeting escalated tensions between the two organizations and their personnel.

64 The integration of non-violence into rural and Indigenous Mennonite communities is a complicated story and highly dependent upon individuals and communities.

65 Lederach is a distinguished author of many books on peace and conflict resolution. He was active with MCC for nearly two decades and he acknowledges that his convictions surrounding non-violence were deeply influenced by his work in Central America, which includes the Desafío 84 conference.

66 MCCA, "Conscientious Objection in Latin America: A Role for NISBCO?," 1991.

67 John Lapp, interview with author, Apr. 1, 1993. As Lapp noted in his conversation, the Guatemalans reminded North American Mennonites that they had become too accepted, too respected, and too wealthy.

68 Arnold Snyder, *The Relevance of Anabaptist Nonviolence for Nicaragua* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, Peace Section, 1984), 120–21.

69 Mark Chupp, "Creating Space for Peace: The Central American Peace Portfolio," in *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (Oxford University Press, 2000), 108.

70 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Marxism and Christianity in Revolutionary Central America: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism*, 98th Cong., 1st session, Oct. 18–19, 1983.

71 For more information on these hearings see Theresa Keeley, *Reagan's Gun-Toting Nuns: The Catholic Conflict over Cold War Human Rights Policy in Central America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

72 MCCA, Report, 1991, 11. This declaration was printed in the *Harvard International Review*.

73 In 2005, all of the events shared by Guatemalans and MCC were verified by the discovery of an old warehouse filled with police and military archives in Guatemala City. It contained millions of documents stolen from Guatemalans who had been disappeared, tortured, and assassinated, as well as documents testifying to their horrific deaths. See Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). The documents have been scanned and are currently held at the University of Texas at Austin.

74 Rich Sider to Henry and Mildred Yoder, letter, Mar. 19, 1986, MCCA, 1–2.

75 MCCA, 1988 Program Planning Summary—Latin America & the Caribbean, 44.

76 MCCA, 1991 Program Panning Summary—Latin America and the Caribbean, 45–46.

77 MCCA, 1991 Program Planning Summary, 45–46.

78 MCCA, Program Plan, 2002–2003.

79 Mario Higueros to MCC, letter, Mar. 9, 1994. MCCA.

80 As many as 5,000 women were murdered every year in Guatemala in this period. For further information see Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds., *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

81 MCCA, Mennonite Central Committee, "Introduction to Guatemala, 2008–2009," 3. In addition to this violence, MCC reported that high rates of corruption continued, 75 percent of Guatemalans lacked access to healthcare, 77

percent were illiterate, and life expectancy for rural Indigenous people was 44 years.

82 Ellen Moodie, *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace: Crime, Uncertainty, and the Transition to Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 58.

83 MCCA, "2002 Program Plan," MCC Guatemala, RedPaz.

84 "La Igualdad de la Mujer," special issue, *Esperanza en Camino*, no. 3 (Mar. 1987).

85 The Washington Consensus favoured trade liberalization benefitting transnational companies and impacting workers globally, as the race for cheap labour meant that companies were redistributed throughout the Global South. By the early 2000s, migration north to the US appeared to be the answer for many Guatemalans. Humanitarian border groups reported that more than half of the migrants were from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

86 MCCA, Latin America & the Caribbean, 1990, 106.

87 *Memoria de los Congresos 2003–2004 Red Regional de Paz y Justicia: Globalización de la Dignidad*, 5.

88 Indicative of their continued shift to include Mayan perspectives, Higueros emphasized traditional Mayan socio-economic practices, situating their experiences within a biblical context.

89 *Memoria de los Congresos*, 53.