

Across the Border

Women theologians plan intercontinental gathering

by *Latin American Women Theologians*



Pastor Beatriz Barrios (Uruguay), MWC executive committee member Elizabeth Vado (Nicaragua), and Rebecca Osiro (Kenya) exchange addresses after their first meeting in Zimbabwe. Latin American women credit the Africans with the inspiration to begin their own movement.

Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson

The Latin American Women Theologians movement is planning a gathering in Paraguay July 13–14, 2009, just before the Mennonite World Conference assembly. Olga Piedrasanta of Guatemala wrote, “I expect that the meeting in Paraguay will be a time to meet many women, friends, sisters, theologians—that we can find each other in our journeys. I hope to reflect and pray together, to be of mutual encouragement to pursue our projects and know that in a country distant from mine, there are people who are praying to God for me.

This will be the first time that women theologians from across the whole region meet together. (The Latin American women theologians include North American women of color who are theologians as well as any women who have been accompanying this process in Latin America as part of this region.) Participants will study the Bible together, focusing on passages that could help in understanding God’s will for families, and how churches can apply Jesus’ teachings in preventing violence and in supporting victims.

On the second day, African women theologians will join the gathering. The Latin American organizers recognize that the example and motivation of their African sisters provided the impetus to begin their own movement in Latin America. They wrote: In the context of the last Mennonite World Conference assembly, held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Africa in 2003, a group of African women theologians shared their pilgrimage in building the Reign of God. Their desire was to see similar opportunities for women in other regions.

This encouraged Latin American women leaders to organize

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themselves. Then Alix Lozano and Ofelia Garcia, together with other church women, presented a proposal to Mennonite World Conference, specifically to its Global Gifts Sharing Project. It was a proposal for coverage and support to achieve women's dreams. It was in this moment that the Latin American Women Theologians movement began.

The relationships with African women theologians have been inspiring to all the women. Olga Piedrasanta comments: "The power of listening to African women theologians has been highly inspiring. They were the ones that started this walk, this pilgrimage, this sharing with each other. I identify with their concerns, their goals, their purposes, and if we know that they pray for us and we pray for them, we will have an incredible strength to accompany each other."

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At first the Latin American women wondered about whether to use the word "theologians" to describe themselves since most don't have degrees in theology. The Africans responded that being called a theologian honors the theological work they do in their churches and communities. Many also are studying theology and some have degrees.

Sandra Campos from Costa Rica gave an example of her recent experience visiting the board of the newly-formed Nicaraguan Anabaptist Women's group begun as a result of the women theologians' movement. One of their projects is to accompany the church Peace and Justice Commission in providing support to about eighty women in a prison in the city of Granada. Sandra wrote: "...We were eight women and two men, and when we got there our sister Auxiliadora Hernández shared a brief Biblical reflection, then we divided into groups and each group reflected on a different biblical text. There was time to listen, to pray for each other. It was time for reconciliation, time for decisions for Jesus.... These servants of Jesus have taken very seriously their commitment in building the Kingdom of Heaven." 