

## News

# Global Youth Summit to precede PA 2015 Assembly



The YABs Committee (in their “Menno Simons is my homeboy!” t-shirts), left to right: Kristina Toews (former chair from Canada); Lani Prunés (U.S.), rep for North America; Marc Pasqués (Spain), rep for Europe; Rodrigo Pedroza García (on-screen from Mexico), chair and rep for Latin America; Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle (Ethiopia), rep for Africa; Sumana Basumata (India), rep for Asia; and mentor Ayub Omondi (Kenya). Photo courtesy of Kristina Toews

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Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA – An international group of young Anabaptists – called the YABs Committee for short – are deep into planning the next Global Youth Summit (GYS), which will immediately precede the upcoming Mennonite World Conference Assembly.

As the official MWC youth committee, they are putting together a mix of worship – with each session planned and led by a different continent, discussions, workshops, fellowship and free time, games, concerts, late-evening activities, and sports. (In contrast to youth conventions in North America, which are geared to high-school-age youth, GYS attendees are ages 18 and older.)

The GYS opens Friday morning, July 17, 2015, on the Messiah College campus in Mechanicsburg, PA, just across the Susquehanna River from Harrisburg, site of the July 21-26 Assembly. GYS concludes late on Sunday evening, July 19.

## **The GYS experience**

Kristina Toews, from Canada, who participated in the Paraguay Global Youth Summit, said recently that the best thing about GYS for her is “meeting new people, hearing what life is like for them, and learning together from each other. I’ve been amazed to see my peers be so passionate about living their faith and being part of a church that’s present in so many different places, languages, and cultures.”

The YABs Committee defines the GYS as “a meeting of young Anabaptists, ages 18 and older, from the entire world.” During their three days together, they “listen to God, share information and experiences, listen to each other’s struggles from their different continents and countries, bless each other, and have their faith enriched.”

Ayub Omondi, from Kenya, a member of the current YABS Committee as a mentor, reflected on the last GYS in Paraguay: “I have been so enriched by our different countries’ and continents’ approach to worship. When the Asians planned worship, I was touched in a different way than usual. When the Europeans led worship, I learned something else new!

“Even in my lodging, I was stretched. My roommate was from Congo and spoke French. I’m from Kenya and speak English. So we used sign language to communicate whenever we were in the room together, and it got really funny!”

Rodrigo Pedroza García, from Mexico and chair of the YABs Committee, urges young adults not to miss opening morning of the GYS for an overview of the event. “We are going to have a short service and then something more informal, inviting those who are arriving to mingle and connect. That’s our main focus of the morning. We’ll have all kinds of activities, some sports, snacks, and games.

“At GYS, I’ve found that you can open your heart beyond the borders of geography, race, language, and social class. You *feel* like you are the body of Christ. The ‘new humanity’ is so real and wonderful as we young people get together to worship the Lord, without focusing on where we come from. When we’re together like this, we experience the unity of our Anabaptist identity in the middle of our plurality!”

## **GYS includes delegates**

To make sure that GYS has representation from Anabaptist-related churches around the world, and to cultivate leadership in those attending, each MWC member denomination is invited to send one young adult delegate. Delegates must be active members of their churches and ideally be involved in youth work. Each should be recommended by the youth and the pastor of her/his local congregation.

Good delegates, says the YABs Committee, are “committed to service and possess leadership qualities; they’re good listeners, learners, and speakers; and they have email access or other ways to stay connected with delegates and other young Anabaptists after GYS.”

Being a delegate isn't a puff job. Before coming to GYS, each delegate must survey a minimum of 50 young adults from her/his national church about the GYS theme. ("Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts" is the theme for the 2015 event.)

During GYS, delegates meet sometimes with their continental groups, and other times with inter-continental groups, to talk about challenges, joys, and resources that they experience in their home settings. They also mix with other participants at GYS to discuss their dreams for the church.

Delegates also take the lead in planning the worship services from their respective continents at GYS, involving others from their regions. "The worship services are a huge highlight of GYS, and an amazing way to see how God has given us different gifts," says Toews. "Our diversity is such a gift. My experience is that we grow closer to God when we see the variety in how our sisters and brothers worship."

### **Expected attendance at GYS 2015**

In Zimbabwe in 2003, more than 220 young adults from 28 countries attended the first GYS. More than 700 attended the second GYS held in Paraguay in 2009. They came from at least 34 countries.

"For the third GYS coming up in 2015, we're hoping for 600-1,000 registrants," says Toews.

For more information about GYS, its activities, and how to register, go to [www.mwc-cmm.org/gys](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/gys).

*MWC release by Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, PA, a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference*