

Bringing the spirit of Zurich home

<https://anabaptistworld.org/bringing-the-spirit-of-zurich-home/> Paul Schrag, June 27, 2025

Former rivals healed historic divisions. Will their reconciliation translate?



Indonesians gather after the 500th anniversary celebration. — Paul Schrag/AW

Does the arc of Christian history bend toward reconciliation? **In Zurich, Switzerland, on May 29**, it did. As [1,200 Anabaptists worshiped in the Grossmünster](#), the arc circled back to the cradle of the Radical Reformation, which breathed new life into the Christian faith but tore the church apart.

When Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and other restless souls heard Ulrich Zwingli preach within the grand sanctuary, did they dream of altering history's course?

It was a time of bold action. The Reformation had come to Zurich, sweeping away thousand-year traditions along with the statues, altars, tapestries and paintings that Zwingli's followers (including soon-to-be Anabaptists) cast out of the Grossmünster.

Five hundred years later, the descendants of former rivals — Mennonites, Reformed Christians, - Lutherans and even a red-capped cardinal who brought greetings from the pope himself — celebrated a reunion of the long- divided Christian family.

Hearts swelled as the congregation sang, reverently in German, *Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe* (Glory Be to God in the Highest) and, joyfully in the Xhosa language of South Africa, *Siyahamba* (We Are Marching in the Light of God).

Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands, president of Mennonite World Conference, summed up the moment and the vision: "Today we offer our collective praise to God that we are living in a new era when churches that once regarded each other as enemies have found ways to apologize, forgive,

work toward the healing of memories and take steps toward reconciliation, even amid our ongoing differences.”

All of this will take courage, as the 500th anniversary celebration’s theme, **“The Courage to Love,”** suggests.

And it will take cooperation, as a statement of reconciliation between MWC and the World Communion of Reformed Churches says: “We pledge to learn from each other by sharing the richness and diversity of our traditions. We bind ourselves to purposeful cooperation that affirms God’s mercy and opens doors to the justice that leads to peace.”

Will this message translate beyond Christian enclaves?

Today in Europe, where religious uniformity once mattered so much that governments put heretics to death, Christians now confront indifference, even incomprehension.

Leading a seminar in Zurich, Dutch pastor Wieteke van der Molen described Europe (and, increasingly, North America) as experiencing Pentecost in reverse: Our neighbors don’t understand our faith story anymore.

For an hour, a roomful of 40 or so Europeans and North Americans batted around ideas about how to translate Christian faith to people who no longer speak its language.

“If we can live as radically inspired by Christ, we will raise questions, even if [other people] don’t know what the Bible is,” a person from Switzerland said. “From these questions, we can tell the story.”

The Anabaptist founders set the standard for radical inspiration. Their movement became known as the Radical Reformation because they pushed farther than others did. They dug deeper to the core of faith, stripping away everything that obscured the essential truths of scripture. They became exiles in their own land, as Christians today might feel in a secular culture.

Confronted with Pentecost in reverse, people of faith who want a skeptical world to understand them will have to heal their own wounds. North American Mennonites, experiencing new divisions in the 21st century, too often lack the spirit of reconciliation that prevailed in Zurich.

In a new joint statement endorsed by MWC and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Anabaptists acknowledge self-righteousness and “a reluctance to see the face of Christ in our Reformed sisters and brothers.” Confessing our sins might be easier on a grand stage in Europe than in a simple sanctuary back home. But, as the MWC-Reformed statement points out, Hebrews 12:14 tells us to “pursue peace with everyone,” even those we know best.