



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Jonathan Bonk, leading mission authority, presents scope of worldwide church
Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) – Citing statistics that the Christian church in Africa in 1900 was outnumbered nearly four to one by Muslims and 100 years later comprises almost half of the continent’s population, Jonathan J. Bonk sketched a map of the world-wide Christian church for Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary students and faculty, October 24–26.

The executive director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Conn., pointed out how the growth and activity of the Christian church in Africa has been misrepresented, underrepresented and ignored by most Christian historians and scholars. In spite of the growth of the church in Africa, even recent attempts by Christian historians to document what is going on in the church “take scarcely any note of Christianity in Africa,” Bonk said.

To address this chasm in awareness and information, the Overseas Ministries Study Center in 1995 initiated the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, an Internet-based bank of stories of Christian people and ministries. Bonk, who is project director, described and demonstrated for the seminary community how this dictionary spans 20 centuries of Christian faith and the whole of the African continent. To counter the perception that the Christian faith emerged there only as a result of mission efforts in the last two centuries, the database includes more than 300 names of Christians prior to the fourth century. Currently there are more than 1,000 stories on the Web site, and it is continually growing as African Christian colleges and seminaries require students to collect and write biographies as part of their masters degree curricula.

Bonk emphasized that the information in the Dictionary is not copyrighted, so although it is available in only five languages—French, Portuguese, Swahili, Arabic and English—it can be translated into other languages. Scholars and historians may draw on it freely for research and publication.

To broaden the picture of the worldwide church, Bonk presented another lecture showing the scope of the church through the world. World population is estimated to be 6.6 billion, he reported, and more than two billion are Christian. Of these, 56 percent are non-white and 44 percent are white. Eleven countries send out more than 10,000 missionaries each year and

eleven countries receive more than 10,000 missionaries a year. The United States is at the top of the list of countries receiving mission workers. Bonk explained, “We don’t feel ourselves to be a mission field but we are.” Then he added, “These numbers point to a relatively healthy international sharing of mission personnel.”

When asked about the increase in the number of mission workers in the last generation, Bonk said, “Wherever you find an emerging church, you will find a missionary church. The first generation Christians really want to share their faith.”

A native of Canada, Bonk grew up in Ethiopia and then returned to Canada as a young adult. He became a member of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan when he moved there with his young family, and he is now an ordained Mennonite minister. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

In his role at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, he edits the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. He has served as president of both the American Society of Missiology and the Association of Professors of Mission. He has published five books, including *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem*.

Bonk’s visit to AMBS was as Theological Center Guest, October 24–26. In this program, AMBS invites to the campus each year a guest who shares how their faith and ministry intersect.