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### **Partnership brings visiting scholars to AMBS**

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) – The ministry of César Moya and Patricia Urueña is grounded in partnership, and for the last year Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary has been included.

Moya and Urueña are originally from Colombia and have served for more than ten years in Quito, Ecuador, in a partnership between Mennonite Mission Network, Colombia Mennonite Church and Central Plains Mennonite Conference. For the 2010-2011 school year, Moya and Urueña were visiting instructors and scholars at AMBS.



One of their goals, Moya said, was to “understand in a better way the North American Anabaptist theology by being more involved in theological discussions and having conversations with faculty and students.”

They have experienced how difficult it is for both North Americans and Latin Americans to understand the other’s perspective, so they hoped to “bring perspectives from the south into courses,” Urueña said, and to better understand issues that Mennonites are dealing with in this context.

The couple, who both have undergraduate theological studies from Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia (Colombia Mennonite Biblical Seminary) and hold masters degrees in theology from Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana (Latin American Biblical University) in Costa Rica, co-taught a course with Walter Sawatsky, AMBS professor of church history and mission. That course, Transformation of Christianity in Latin America, combined the experiences and perspectives of Moya and Urueña with historical and Mennonite background from Sawatsky. “We just passed the baton back and forth,” Sawatsky said of their teamwork in leading the class.

Rebecca Slough, AMBS academic dean, noted, “We simply could not have offered that class without them. They brought everything from their experience into the class discussion.”

Slough emphasized the rich perspectives that both instructors brought to AMBS: “They had experience in congregational settings with a population of refugees that have been traumatized; those are important perspectives. And because they both have theological training, their practical perspective was complemented by theological reflection.”

Sawatsky said, “They are scholars who are always thinking from the perspective of the church, which means they have a broad scope; it’s not common to function in this way.” And, he added, the male-female partnership they model is also unusual.

In their ministry in Ecuador, Moya and Urueña are biblical and theological teachers and they have helped to establish two congregations, one in Quito and one Riobamba in the northern part of the country. Urueña, in addition to teaching among the indigenous churches

and in the Seminario Sudamericano (South American Seminary), leads peace education programs for children. At AMBS, she participated in several classes related to peace and justice, giving her opportunities to both contribute her perspectives and learn more about the North American context.

Moya is working toward a Ph.D. through the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) in Amsterdam and used opportunities during the year to consult with AMBS faculty about his dissertation. His project, "A New Anabaptist Latin American Hermeneutic," combines the biblical theme of justice that Latin Americans emphasize with the biblical themes of seeking peace and nonviolence that Anabaptists emphasize.

In Latin America, Moya explained, people read the Bible regularly. "The problem is not that they aren't reading the Bible, but how they are reading it." So he is addressing questions such as "How can we be aware of injustices in Latin America when we are reading the Bible and also find hope and light in the biblical text in nonviolent ways? How can we identify a new balance and produce changes by studying the Bible from the perspective of nonviolence?"

With the goal of learning as much as they could about the North American Mennonite context, Urueña and Moya were involved in Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart with opportunities there to share from their perspectives and ministry. They also visited Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor in Goshen, observing how that congregation provides room for people to talk from their reality as immigrants to the U.S.

Commenting on what they valued about their experience at AMBS, Urueña said, "We appreciate your chapel services and the spirituality that we experience. AMBS is working very carefully to put people in touch with God, using poetry and the arts. By seeing how you are creative in this way, we can learn how to connect people to God in our ministry."

The year at AMBS was a cooperative effort among Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Mission Network and AMBS. This meant that assignments for Urueña and Moya extended beyond the seminary and local area. The couple visited congregations in Central Plains conference that support their work and hosted a group of leaders from both Mennonite congregations in Ecuador. Urueña served as part of a Mennonite World Conference delegation meeting with Adventists and Moya served with others representing Latin America at the closing event of the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence.

A personal benefit for the couple was the opportunity to spend time with their three children. One is a recent graduate of Goshen College and two are students there.

For the seminary, Slough summed up the benefits saying, "It is valuable to have scholars from different parts of the world offer their perspectives that expand and challenge our own. César and Patricia spoke of their church situation in Ecuador in ways that didn't match our theological assumptions."

Lane Miller, AMBS student, said that hearing Moya's point of view taught him about his own theology. But it was not always the content of the class or the lecture that was important. "I don't think intercultural experiences are ever smooth," he said, "but they are often rewarding in the end. What was instructive was the experience of intercultural communication and international church relations. Those dynamics are ones we have to face today and they are important for the global church and for individuals."

"To have somebody teaching from another context creates a unique setting for thinking about a topic in new ways," Sawatsky said. "We have had more windows on Latin America because they are here.

"Just by having them in our community we have seen things in new ways and those perspectives enter into class discussions and create a context of kinship," Sawatsky added. "Now we need to do this for Africa, Asia and Europe, too."

Moya and Urueña will leave AMBS at the end of August, returning to their faith community in Quito, which has been led by others in the congregation during their absence. They hope to continue encouraging new leadership while they devote more of their time to theological education and pastoral training programs.

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Mary E. Klassen

Photo caption:

César Moya (right) and Patricia Urueña (center right) were guest instructors and scholars at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary during the 2010-2011 school year. For a course they co-taught on Christianity in Latin America, class members included (from left) Israel Ditzler, Lane Miller and Dong Ju Park. (Photo by Peter Ringenberg)