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**Anabaptist reconciliation with Reformed Church in Zurich to bring healing, hope**  
*by Kendra King*

NEWTON, Kan. (MC USA) -- An official ceremony of reconciliation between leaders of the Reformed Church in Zurich and Anabaptist descendants from around the world will take place in Zurich, Switzerland this summer.

For six months beginning in March, the Evangelical-Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich will commemorate the 500th anniversary of Heinrich Bullinger, one of the fathers of the Reformed Church. On June 26, they will also honor Felix Manz, a founder of the Anabaptist movement, in a special ceremony. As a part of this ceremony, a memorial to Manz will be unveiled and placed on the bank of the Limmat River, where Manz was drowned in 1527 for his Anabaptist convictions.

Recently, officials of the Reformed Church in Zurich have expressed a desire to acknowledge their "shadow side," including 16th- and 17th-century persecution and execution of Anabaptists.

"The Reformation started as a movement of renewal but immediately turned out to become a story of separations," said Peter Dettwiler, ecumenical officer of the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Zurich. "It's time to set a memorial in the city of Zurich where the roots of both the Reformed and the Anabaptists are to be found."

The Reformed Church has invited 100 North American representatives to join in this ceremony of past acknowledgement and future hope. These individuals are to include Amish and Hutterites, as well as other spiritual descendants of Anabaptists. In addition, Larry Miller of (MWC) is coordinating the broader participation by the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community. Swiss Mennonites are playing an important role in the planning.

John Sharp, director of the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives, is coordinating North American participation in this commemoration. Sharp became involved in planning this event quite by chance last June. Through a relative, John Zook, an airline pilot who frequently flies to Switzerland, Sharp's name was given to Elisabeth Lutz, a friend in Zurich. Both Lutz and Zook were involved in negotiating the approval and placement of the Manz marker. Sharp traveled to Zurich to participate in the discussions, and also met with officials of the Evangelical Reformed Church for conversation on the proposed conference.

While this will be a historic commemoration, it is not an isolated event, Sharp said. Other similar discussions have taken place in the past. In 1983, MWC participated in a

discussion with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, followed by a public service of confession for injustice during the Reformation.

This dialogue resumed again in 1984 and 1989. Swiss Mennonites and state church representatives have engaged in various steps toward understanding and reconciliation in the last 20 years. More recently, in 2002, some Mennonites, Amish and members of the Reformed Church gathered informally to engage in discussion and acknowledgement of past wrongs.

"All of these conversations seem to be part of an emerging ecumenical impulse toward reconciliation," Sharp said. "The challenge is to engage in serious discussions of core commitments, so that reconciliation ceremonies like this one have integrity."

So what makes this event special? This will be the largest gathering of officials and members of the Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich and Anabaptist descendants, Sharp said.

"The setting for this conference -- the great cathedral, where the dramatic actions that birthed the Anabaptist movement took place -- adds to its historic nature," Sharp said. "In Zurich, participants will have an opportunity to engage in conversations of hope with two once-adversarial traditions."

In addition, the memorial to Manz will be unveiled on the bank of the Limmat River at the place of his execution.

"It will be a great honor and a joy to have direct descendants of the Anabaptists with us," Dettwiler said. "We hope this event can become a new beginning of ecumenical relations among our churches and congregations."

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