

Written by Sarah Thompson, Outreach Coordinator for Christian Peacemaker Teams  
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**CPTnet, 26 June 2013** - In 2011, the Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) announced that it would continue with plans to have the biennial church-wide convention 1-6 July 2013 in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, despite recent legislation passed in Arizona that put Latino Mennonites at risk of search and deportation if they "looked illegal." The MCUSA constituent group Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church) stated that it was hurt by the symbolic message this sent to Latino Mennonites. It further said that it would abstain from participation in the convention.

Ephesians 2:14-16 illustrates the way Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection brought people from different ethnic and religious groups together. Indeed Jesus' call was broad, beautiful, and boundary-crossing. It was not, however, without challenge as to how people from these different groups were to come together as part of the larger, new body.

Jesus' work of breaking the dividing wall that stood between people was not so much a naïve "forget your differences and privileges" as it was a careful invitation to form new relationships. These new relationships became possible through analyzing old tensions and building strong new bonds of care and community.

Those who want to break down walls must accurately name and patiently examine the impact of entrenched inequality of power created by division. Otherwise, we may be able to come together physically but as the dividing wall falls it may crush people entering the relationships.

In these cases, sometimes standing apart helps us to analyze critically the dividing walls that separate us from being in right relationship with one another, and find safer ways to reach out to each other in the midst of the rubble.

Part of breaking down the dividing wall of imperialist immigration politics is to abstain from going to a place where the fall of the wall is dangerous for a vulnerable group. It forces us not to celebrate unity in Christ prematurely. In their abstention, Iglesia Menonita Hispana (IMH) called for allies to share the weight of the falling wall.

## UNITED STATES REFLECTION: Acknowledging the dividing wall and respecting the call to abstain from th

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Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), as an organization constituted primarily by U.S.ers and Canadians with legal documents chose to be an early ally to IMH. One CPT supporter expressed surprise that CPT—an organization that does strategic nonviolent intervention in areas of lethal conflict ( [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org) )—would not be present in "the middle of this Phoenix conflict." I responded by saying that we only go where we are invited, and in this case, we were invited NOT to go somewhere.

The IMH's abstention forced the Mennonite church to have a necessary conversation about U.S. immigration politics. The content and programming of the upcoming MCUSA convention in Phoenix is better because of that heartfelt, analytical conversation about the dividing wall. I pray that the symbols of other falling walls, will open our eyes to see the necessity of the upside-down kin-dom...the necessity of being a community fortified not by walls and warnings, but by commitment to believer's baptism, discipleship, bearing nonviolent witness, love, and networks of care.