



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Worship Resources

Prepared by MWC member churches in Asia for 24 January 2021 or at any time convenient for your congregation.

Theme and texts

a. Theme:
Following Jesus together across barriers

b. Why this theme was chosen:
This is the theme chosen for the Indonesia 2022 Assembly. As a global Anabaptist faith community our priorities are summarized in these words.

- We follow Jesus:**
- Together, not alone.
 - Across barriers that try to keep us divided.

c. Biblical texts:
Old Testament:
Isaiah 55:1-6
Psalm: 27
Gospel:
John 4:1-42
New Testament:
Philippians 2:1-11

d. Relationship between the theme and the biblical texts:
We read about people crossing barriers to follow God's commands.

- The prophet Isaiah writes that we are a witness to all nations when we reflect the glory of God.
- The Psalmist writes our courage comes from God even when we are afraid.
- In the Gospel of John, Jesus reaches across religious, racial/ethnic, and gender boundaries to connect with the Samaritan woman, who then witnesses to her community that Jesus is the Messiah.
- In Philippians, Paul tells us how to follow Jesus in obedience, with concern for other people's needs and interests more than our own. We too are all called to follow Jesus together by crossing barriers.

2

Prayer Requests



Hoi Thanh Mennonite Church

a. From MWC members in Asia

- Pray for the 23 member and associate member churches/conferences in Asia (Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam). Christianity is a minority in many of these countries. Pray that MWC member churches who are suffering persecution and hardship may have courage and hope to persevere.
- Praise God for the Asian churches: members of the Body of Christ. May they always be united and connected to us and to each other through the bonds of the love of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. May they care for one another, accept one another and equip one another to witness to God's glory in this world.

b. From MWC

- Give thanks that Anabaptists around the world are united in faith in God's kingdom across language and cultural differences.
- Give thanks for the growing networks in the MWC family: mission, service, health, peace and education.
- Pray for sisters and brothers everywhere who are struggling with weakness due to illness, violence, disaster or injustice. May we embrace them. May God's power change everything for us all.
- Pray for MWC General Secretary César García, and MWC Asian Representatives Agus Mayanto (Southeast Asia), Cynthia Peacock (South Asia) and Jeremiah Choi (Northeast Asia) as they lead and minister to the churches in Asia and around the world.
- Pray for the upcoming Assembly in Indonesia. Pray for the planners as they adjust to a new gathering date and create protocols for a safe and enjoyable event that welcomes thousands of people to Semarang. Pray that the Spirit will be at work in the hearts and minds of all participants bringing unity in the Spirit.



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

3

Song Suggestions

From the MWC International Songbook 2015:

- #7 Som'landela/We will follow
- #15 [Make us one and make us holy](#)
- #20 [Sari srishti ke malik tumhi ho](#)
/All praise to the God of Creation
- #22 May the peace of Christ be with you
- #30 Abre mis ojos/Open my eyes

I have decided to follow Jesus



Jhoriadih Church, BJCPM, India

Vikal Rao

4

Visual resources

- a. In India, colourful decorations are common to all faiths, bringing joy and a spirit of festivity to everyone. Many Christian churches use an abundance of flowers, coloured paper decorations, balloons and tinsels to decorate churches, homes and streets during Christmas and the New Year, often staying decorated through January and February.
 - Children and adults can make paper chains from colourful scrap paper (and sparkly fragments), with the interlocking loops representing togetherness, and the chains stretching across barriers.
 - Decorate the front of your meeting area and your entryway with an abundance of flowers and flower garlands.
- b. Javanese art is at the front of the church in Jepara, Indonesia, linking the cross to traditional Javanese themes. See this story: t2m.io/66iipq00



5

Offering (One Lunch)

- MWC invites congregations to take a special offering for our global Anabaptist church community on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. Invite every member to contribute the cost of at least *one lunch* in their community in order to support the networks and resources in our global faith community of MWC.
- Sacrificing *one lunch* is our humble way of giving thanks to God and supporting the ongoing ministry of God through MWC.



6

Additional Resources

www.mwc-cmm.org/awfs

- a. In this package
 - Suggested liturgies for gathering and for benediction (p. 3)
 - Prayers (p. 6)
 - Biblical texts for sermon content (p. 7)
 - Testimonies from Asia (p. 14)
 - Cultural contributions from Asia (p. 19)
- b. Online:
 - Pictures
 - Song videos
 - Posters
 - Sample bulletin covers



The biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas, testimonies and other resources in this package have been prepared by members of MWC out of their experience in their local context. The teaching does not necessary represent an official MWC position.

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Suggested liturgies for gathering and benediction

Gathering/opening

Leader: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I welcome you, our sisters and brothers in this time of worship.

People: It is a joy to be together in God's house.

Leader: We raise our voices with a heart full of earnest longing.

People: This is a good time to thank and praise our God.

Leader (raising right hand): May the peace of God the Father, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and always.

People: Amen

Leader: Let us greet one another and welcome each other to our worship together.

Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara (Gereja Inijili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara, Indonesia

Gathering/Call to Worship

Leader: O come, let us give our ears to the witness of truth!

People: Lord, we are here to learn about following your commands to cross the spiritual, emotional and physical barriers that surround us.

Leader: O come, let us reflect the glory of the Lord of Israel!

People: Lord, we are here, help us to be salt and light in this world.

Leader: O come, let us seek the Lord while he may be found!

People: Lord, we are here. Come to us, so that we may call upon you.

*Nishant Sidh, Mennonite Church in India,
Rajnandgaon, India*

Responsive Reading/Prayer

based on Psalm 27 (NRSV)

Leader: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

People: Lord, may your light and salvation extend, crossing all barriers of casteism, classism, religionism and individualism. Fill this world that is full of fears with your confidence.

Leader: One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all round me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melodies to the Lord.

People: Lord, we are your holy temple. Give us a desire and burden to be a refuge and a hiding place to the people who have become homeless and jobless in pandemic times, and are struggling to settle down again in their lives.

Leader: Hear O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come", my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me.

People: Many of our brothers and sisters created in your image are crying out in despair and hopelessness. May the peace, joy and hope that is found in our Lord Jesus Christ rest upon their lives.



Leader: Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

People: Lord, use your church to welcome and take care of the forsaken in our communities around us.

Leader: Teach me your ways, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

People: The lives of many people have changed because of the coronavirus pandemic in this last year. Many of us are walking rough paths of uncertainty, danger and deprivation. Help us, so that by following Jesus together, we may help all to see the goodness of God, as we all seek a smooth level path in our lives.

ALL: Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

*Nishant Sidh, Mennonite Church in India,
Rajnandgaon, India*

Apostle's Creed
(spoken together by all):

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God
the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*that is, the true Christian church of all times
and all places

*used by GITJ in Indonesia and by
Mennonite Church in India*



Phuhinrongkla Church in Thailand. Photo: Len Rempel



Benediction

My brothers and sisters, as we end our worship together, let us keep our hearts turned to God. Have the mind of Christ, free to live in love. Walk the Jesus way to cross dividing lines. Live in love and peace in our fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ.

May love and understanding be in our hearts and in the world.
 May peace and friendship be a place of refuge for us in the midst of storms.
 May we have the power to speak the truth, proclaim peace and be compassionate.
 May we experience inspiration in the Holy Spirit, blessings and love from God, and peace from the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we can join together in bringing righteousness, justice and community to the world.
 Amen.

Wish each other peace, one to each other:
 The peace of Christ be with you.
 And also with you!

*Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara
 (Gereja Inijili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara, Indonesia*



**Rajnandgaon BGCMC church says hello to MWC family.
 Photo: Henk Stenvers**



Prayers

Commandment to Love, and Prayer of repentance:

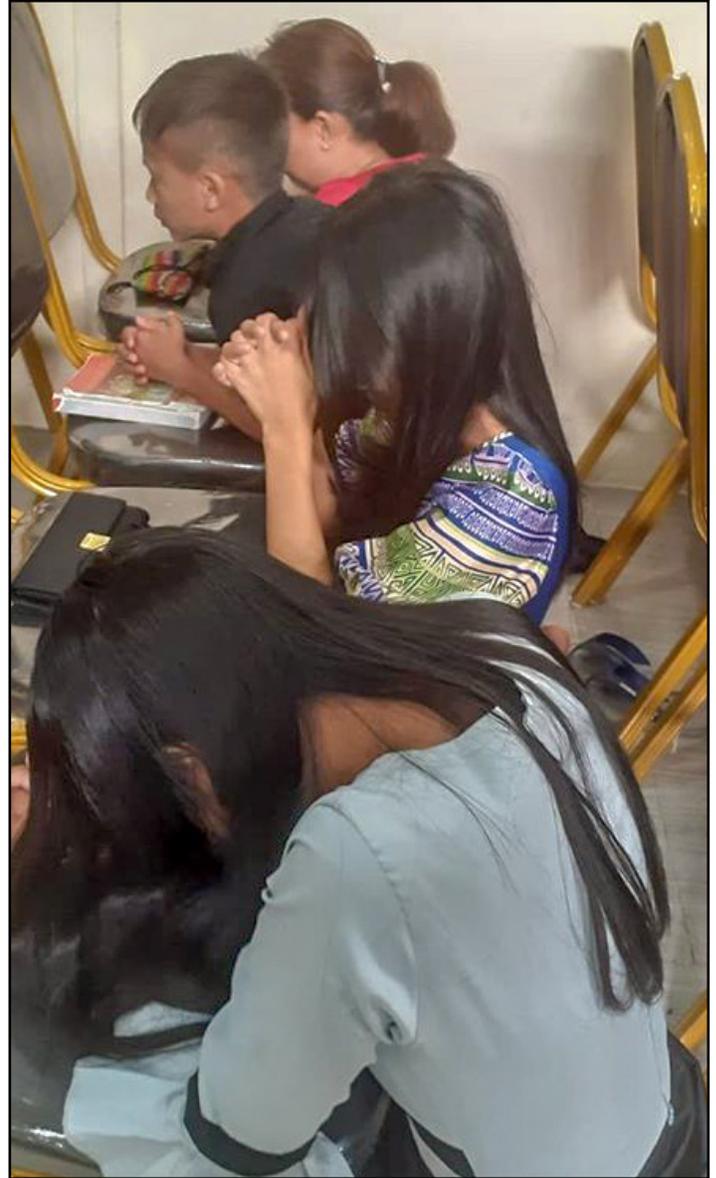
Beloved brothers and sisters, to be disciples of Jesus Christ means to walk behind him and follow his example and commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ gives us a great commandment, the commandment to love: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. The second commandment is similar: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Dear Father, we are grateful for your grace, which has called us as your disciples to gather to celebrate our love as your family. We are grateful that you also remind us of our calling as your disciples, to love you with all our heart, and to love our neighbours. We realize that we have many shortcomings to do your will, to love you, and to love our neighbours: selfishness, fear, our reluctance to cross the boundaries that separate us. So we beg you to love us and encourage us to continue to love you and to love our neighbours with the power of your Spirit.

*Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara
(Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara, Indonesia*

Recite the Lord’s Prayer all together.

Frequently used by many churches in Asia



Prayer service 1 January 2020 at Bible Missionary Church, Myanmar. Photo: Amos Chin



Biblical background for sermon content

Old Testament: Isaiah 55:1-6

Sometimes we think that a “prophet” refers to someone who specializes in a kind of prophecy that means foretelling the future. But the original meaning of “prophet” (Hebrew “*nabi*”) means “to gush like a spring”, meaning that the prophet was inspired by the Holy Spirit and poured out the word of God like a living spring. The prophets in the Bible are all pouring out what they heard God speaking to his people. The idolatry of their time caused them to be moved by the Holy Spirit to speak for God. Some of their prophecies related to local affairs of their time, and some of their prophecies related to the future.

In order to understand a book of prophecy like Isaiah correctly, we must understand the era and the context in which the prophet lived. Traditionally, it was understood that Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, and wrote the book around 700 BC over a period of about 60 years. At this time the Assyrian empire was having an impact on the decline of Judah, but it was well before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Recent scholars believe that the book of Isaiah was actually written by three different people under the name of Isaiah, and was compiled over a period of about 300 years – both before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The text of the book of Isaiah is divided into three eras (and authors). First Isaiah (chapters 1-39) is set in the times of Kings Uzziah, Jotam, Ahaz and Hezekiah before the fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity. Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66) are based after the fall of Jerusalem, when the captives were allowed to return to Jerusalem after a time of captivity to try to rebuild their community and their faith. Our Scripture today, Isaiah 55, is part of Second Isaiah.

Second Isaiah received the revelation of God, and called on Judah to leave their homes in prosperous Babylon and return to the deserted and destroyed city of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. As the captives return to a devastated city, God reminds them that David’s covenant with God still stands, as a witness to the peoples, and as a testimony of God’s people among all nations. For the people of Israel returning to a destroyed city after captivity, there is a big gap between the reality they live and the beauty described by the prophet. The temple was destroyed! Where was the glory of God? It did not seem to be in Jerusalem. Yet God called them out of their safety zone, to walk the pilgrimage road and to rebuild Jerusalem.

This is how this train of thought connects to us today:

- Let the nations see the glory of God in the covenant with David and God’s people.
- Let the nations see the glory of God in Jesus Christ.
- Let the nations see the glory of God in Christians.

Where are you living well? How is God calling you to leave your safety zone? Will your going out of your safety zone be a witness for God, bringing glory to God? Will you have the courage to leave? Will you have the courage to say “Here I am, send me”?

God is calling people to leave the quiet and comfortable parts of their life to enter a desolate world full of unknowns. In our happy life, have we forgotten the grace of the Lord? Are you lost in your abundant life?

The first few verses in Isaiah 55 use the personification method, whereby “wisdom” appears in the form of a woman. Wisdom, in these verses, invites everyone to enjoy the rich



food that comes with wisdom. This sounds like Jesus talking to the Samaritan women in John 4, offering living water that takes away thirst. Only God can satisfy our thirst, our hunger, and give us life and wisdom.

We rely on Jesus Christ to have peace in our hearts – not because the outside environment is stable, and not because we can control our environment. It is because we know who controls tomorrow for us as Christians. God gives us the strength to be a witness for the glory of God to the people, no matter what is happening in our environment around us.

Discipleship means following Jesus. Discipleship means we say goodbye to our attitude toward life, our habits, our lifestyle and the things we valued in our past. Isaiah was called by God to call the people of Judah to leave their comfortable lives, to follow God back to Jerusalem, in order to be a witness to God’s glory among the nations.

Let us seek God’s calling to us in our time. Be willing to leave your safety zone. Prepare yourself to enter a time of “unknown”, like the unknown future that the pandemic has caused for many people, and like the anxiety in Hong Kong about what will happen as China takes more control (see story). The real satisfaction comes from seeking the Lord while he may be found, calling upon him while he is near. That is what will be a witness to the peoples, and will glorify God.

*Pastor Jeremiah Choi, Hong Kong
Mennonite Church*

Psalm: 27

This psalm of David shows the value of worship, whether that is individual, or group, in person or online. This psalm reflects the range of emotions that we are free to share with God and each other in worship: confidence in God’s presence, and fear that God is absent. All are part of worship.

Gospel: John 4:1-42

This encounter begins when Jesus is traveling through Samaria. The people of Samaria were enemies of the people of Israel. Both peoples thought they were the true heirs of the covenant with Abraham and each thought only they truly worshipped God the right way. I wonder if you have ever heard those thoughts around your church today, that you are the ones who worship God the right way?



Young dancers worship at a Brethren in Christ Church in Nepal in 2018. Photo: Henk Stenvers

Jesus stops to get a drink from a well, which is not just any well, but one that Jacob had dug about 2 000 years earlier. Jesus meets a woman there at the well, at a time of day when most women did not come to the well. He directly asks her for a drink of water. She responds with some sarcasm and skepticism about why he is asking her. They end up in a long conversation about husbands and living water and true worship.

She seizes the moment to ask a question that has bothered her for a long time. “Our fathers worship on this mountain, but you Jews say that the only place to worship is Jerusalem. Who’s got it right?” The Jews believed that Mount Zion in Jerusalem is the dwelling place for God, while the Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim is



God's dwelling place, quite close to Jacob's Well. Jesus responds that the time is coming when worship will not be in Jerusalem, and not on the Samaritan mountain either. Jesus says that true worshippers will worship God as Spirit, in spirit and in truth, and not in a place. Jesus focuses on the people as worshippers and not on the place.

- Worship is in spirit, coming from the hearts of people, and not from their rituals or sacrifices in a specific manner and place.
- Jesus is the Messiah for everyone, whether Jewish or Samaritan – or even Gentile, as the early church learned very slowly.
- There are no dividing walls or barriers that limit Jesus.



Jesus Village Church in South Korea prepares to send a display for the Global Village at Assembly 16 in Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, USA. Photo: Soo Jin Hwang

This is a fascinating story. There was a huge dividing wall between the Samaritans and the Jews. The woman is an alien, an enemy, a hostile Samaritan – and a woman. Merely speaking to her is seen as disgraceful by Jesus' disciples when they returned. Yet Jesus reveals more to this Samaritan woman than he had done so far with any of his disciples. Jesus reaches across the dividing walls of racism, ethnocentrism, religious divisions, and gender to reveal truth to her. She understands Jesus to be the Messiah, something that the Samaritans also believed, although not quite in the same way as the Jewish people. Jesus tells her, this Samaritan woman, that he is indeed that Messiah, the living water that gives eternal life.

In just a few paragraphs in this story, everything both the Samaritans and Jews believed was turned upside down. Everyone has to rethink their beliefs.

- God is Spirit, and not bound to a place. Not Jerusalem, and not Gerizim.

It is hard for us to imagine how strange each of these ideas was at the time. And yet, these ideas are so exciting that the Samaritan woman tells everyone she knew about her encounter with Jesus, and many Samaritans come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. This Samaritan woman is thirsty, desperately thirsty for the good news that Jesus shared with her, desperately thirsty to be known and loved.

Can you think of times in your life when you were so desperate that you didn't know any way forward, and wondered if God had abandoned you, or your people? These desperate times are part of our life's journey for each one of us.

Can you think of times that you could see God's love at work, providing a way across dividing walls? Are you able to follow Jesus across the dividing walls of tradition and place, of racism and ethnocentrism, to proclaim the Messiah at work?

God is not bound by place or tradition. Like the Samaritan woman, let us be thirsty for the work of the Spirit; let us cross barriers for the undivided love of God.

- God's Spirit is accessible to us, and to everyone in the world.
- Worship is in spirit, accessible to us, even in ways that might feel unfamiliar or wrong.
- Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, even for those of us who are on the other side of barriers in our society.
- God's love crosses barriers that would separate any one of us from God.



What does it mean to be the people of God, to be people of faith, even as our understanding of God’s love and how we worship shifts and changes over time and place?

We are a cultural people: our traditions and languages are the means through which we understand God and worship God. Our cultural traditions ground us in many meaningful ways. Our ways are comfortable and familiar, but they are not the only ways to worship God. Too often we are afraid that differences in experiencing God and in how we worship will create disunity and will scatter us.

God is Spirit. We worship in spirit. And Jesus’s good news about the love of God is for everyone, in every culture and background and language. We have much to learn how the love of God is experienced by different people across the barriers that usually divide us. We have much to learn in following Jesus to cross those barriers.

Arli Klassen, MWC Coordinator of Regional Representatives, Canada

New Testament: Philippians 2:1-11

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Paul advised the church to maintain unity and care as a community in Christ. The congregation should “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (2:2); care for one another with counsel, comfort, love, communion of the Spirit and compassion (2:1). The members should not to look for selfish interests, but humble themselves and give priority to others (2:3), looking after the interests of others (2:4).

It is unity and care that form a true alliance. Remember that fellowship is not just a crowd of people (see story). Fellowship is not just about being together (co-existing), but about being connected in integral ways with each other

(pro-existing). Fellowship is not just gathering, but also mutually embracing each other as bound together.

This fellowship is only possible if everyone dares to cross the boundaries that have been separating people (2:3-4). It requires motivation to move people to action, found in a spirituality or an inner drive that is fruitful in behaviour. Without this spirituality, the unity and care expressed by Paul would be mere soulless activity.

In the tradition of our Anabaptist churches, discipleship is always understood in terms of behaviour and ethics (*orthopraxis*). But ethics must be grounded in spirituality which is the foundation for a living practice (*orthopneumatics*).

What kind of spirituality can push us across boundaries so that unity and care can be realized? The answer is seen in what Paul goes on to say, that we focus our thoughts and feelings in Christ Jesus (2:5). We follow Jesus by not only doing what Jesus did, but by having a mind like Christ. This is about emptying oneself like Jesus (2:6-7). The word “emptying” can mean giving up or putting down what is owned, making yourself less important. That becomes clear by seeing Jesus take off his glory to be



Footwashing service at GKMI Anugerah Rayon Kembangan, Jakarta, Indonesia. Photo: supplied



a servant. Thus, having a Christ-like mind means we have the way of thinking, the motivation like the Lord Jesus, who devoted himself to others.

Emptying ourselves will push us to want to cross the boundaries that separate us from others. The Lord Jesus, who emptied himself and become human, set our example. He is God, who crosses the boundary that separates God and humanity, between the eternal and the mortal. A God who empties himself is willing to embrace being human for the salvation of the people he loves. This becomes a call for us as his disciples to empty ourselves. This is an upside-down thought for our times. Whereas people want to be first and make others as adversaries, instead the mind of Christ invites us to take the initiative to cross these dividing walls by leaving our ambitions and interests to meet and be present with others. When people allow racial, ethnic or religious identities to ignore others outside our own identity, that is when the mind of Christ invites us to go beyond our identities to engage with others.

A second important thing we can learn from this is that the thought of emptying ourselves makes us want to share life space with others. If we pay attention, the word “emptying” can also mean pouring out, so that there is space within us that can be filled by others. The Lord Jesus who emptied himself to be a servant shows his love that wants to share life with us as humans.

Without emptying yourself there is no room for others within us. Therefore, self-emptying can be a picture of “hospitality”, such as the hospitality of God who embraced humanity. This is important. We need to pay attention. Crossing boundaries to fellowship with others requires our willingness to share space with others. Without self-emptying and willingness to hospitably share space with others, our desire to cross borders will actually slip into aggression, conquest and mastery, and not into acceptance and service. Crossing the boundary means that we enter into

other people’s spaces, and at the same time make room for others to enter ours. Without the willingness to share space within us, there is no fellowship, no mutual embracing.



**A choir celebrates the 60th anniversary of the Fellowship of Mennonite Churches in Taiwan (FOMCIT) in 2015.
Photo: KyongJung Kim**

It is undeniable that by crossing boundaries and sharing space there will be risks that must be faced. We must become vulnerable. By opening up space for others, that means we open ourselves, and at the same time show our fragility. We are reluctant to get hurt, and reluctant to show our vulnerability. For that we build thick and high walls to provide a sense of security. Yes, at the same time those walls separate us from the others. Love calls us to be vulnerable, instead of building protection with power. That is what we can see from the Lord Jesus. Jesus emptied himself, crossed the divide into humanity, even willing to be a servant instead of a king. He then stretched out his arms, opened himself, and made room for all humans in the embrace of his love. Let us follow Jesus, together, across dividing walls.

*Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara
(Gereja Inijili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara,
Indonesia*



New Testament: Philippians 2:1-11

All over the world the pandemic has left many people with anxiety and uncertainty. Many of us lost dear ones. Many lost their jobs. Many felt what it means to be homeless, deprived, and locked up. But regardless of these anxieties, we as Christians are called to follow Jesus, crossing all the barriers. No barrier should hinder us in fulfilling our responsibilities as Christians.

In the Bible, we read in many places how Jesus broke or crossed barriers to fulfill his responsibilities and to follow the commands of his father:

- When Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman, he crossed religious, racial and gender barriers.
- Jesus crossed the barriers of classism and spiritualism while dining with Zacchaeus.
- Jesus did not care about his own health while healing the lepers. Jesus touched the lepers and healed them. Jesus crossed this physical barrier.

No barrier or obstacle could stop Jesus.

Maybe we have been very active in doing God's work, but fear for our safety (pandemic or other troubles) limits our movement and actions. Is this fear an excuse for not doing God's work? The answer may not be easy for many of us, but the Bible guides us. The Bible does not teach us to act unwisely.

How can we help others and spread the gospel, wisely, even in situations of disaster and fear?

1. Emptying Oneself (verses 6-7)

Jesus emptied himself. Though he was God, he did not regard equality with God. Christ's humiliation included making himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, and being made in the likeness of humanity. He left everything for us. Jesus denied his deity, his power, his supremacy.

To serve God, it is needed that we become nothing. We too need to deny ourselves, our power, our position, our ego, our comfort, etc. (Luke 14:33). Unless we empty ourselves, we will not be able to cross the barriers and serve the Lord.

2. Obedience (verse 8)

Though he himself was God, Jesus was always submissive to the will of God. He humbled himself. Jesus was obedient to the point of dying on the cross to save people.

When Jesus was leaving this earth after the resurrection he gave the greatest commandment (Matthew 28:19). Now it is up to us to obey this commandment. We have to reach out to the people. We need to tell them about the love of Christ through our words and actions. All around, we see people who are shelterless, jobless, hungry and sick: we are called to reach out to them.

The Bible tells us to serve one another humbly, in love (Galatians 5:13). The Bible promises blessings to those who are generous (Proverbs 22:9). The Bible commands us to share our belongings with those in need (Luke 3:11 and Leviticus 25:35). We are to obey the Word of God, as we follow Jesus, even when facing the worst situations. Jesus was obedient to the point of death.

3. Looking out for the interests of others (verse 4)

Paul commands us to avoid greediness or dishonesty. Paul's goal was to move the focus from self to others. Those who put others first exhibit Christ-like character through love and humility.

Situations of disaster and fear, like the pandemic, make many people greedy and fearful. We are tempted to go to the stores and to hoard things because we might not find them tomorrow. The Bible warns us against such attitude (Luke 12:15).



To follow Christ, it is compulsory to be free from the love of money (Hebrews 13:5).

It is wise and good to think about and care for our needs and family needs, but is it not also good to think about others and their needs? Do we trust Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-26?

Let us learn to share our resources with others. Christ never looked for his own interest, but he gave himself for us. We follow him in living and dying for others. To cross barriers and serve the Lord we need to follow the footsteps of Jesus.

May God give us his grace to empty ourselves to follow him, to be obedient to the point of death, and to be more concerned about others' needs and interests than our own.

From Amita Sidh, Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church of the Mennonite Church in India



**Yayoidai Brethren In Christ church in Japan.
Photo: KyongJung Kim**



Testimonies from Asia

Crossing boundaries to connect deeply

Technology has cut the distance that has separated us during the pandemic times when we could not meet in person.

Even though technology is able to bring us closer, it does not guarantee that we are truly connected and intertwined with one another. Physical and virtual closeness, even when we can see each other, does not mean that we are connected to one another.

For example, when we take a busy city bus, the distance between passengers is no more than 50 cm. Sometimes we even touch each other, but that does not mean we are connected to each other. The reality is that each person is still a stranger to the other.

That can happen anywhere, even in a family, so that family members get together but are not connected together. We can live in very dense housing, but we are not necessarily connected. It maybe that we even build a high wall that separates our neighbouring houses.

The walls or boundaries that we build can be about economics, ethnicity or race, politics, ideology, sexual orientation and so on.

Don't say it is not in the church! In the church, we can meet, shake hands, sing and hear the Word together, but being together physically or virtually is still no guarantee of deep fellowship. As followers of Jesus, we must follow across all these boundaries to build deep connections.

— *Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara, Indonesia*



Jeremiah Choi preaches in COVID-19 times, February 2020, Hong Kong Mennonite Church. Photo: supplied

Hong Kong fears for religious freedom

Over the past year, Hong Kong has undergone tremendous political changes. The police crackdowns have been repeated one after another. How should the church manage in these times? How should believers deal with this?

When I was growing up, I thought that my generation lived in the best times, because we had electronics, computers, microwaves, televisions, fiber optics and space: things that did not exist for the generation before us.

Now, in Hong Kong, we are entering a generation of “unknown”. We don't know what will happen tomorrow in regard to our relationship with China. How will increased Chinese control of Hong Kong impact the church in Hong Kong? The religious system in mainland China is very different from Hong Kong. The impact of the new National Security Law is unknown, with some people thinking it will make Hong Kong and its churches safer, while others are very uneasy. Some worry that this is the end of Hong Kong.



Whatever happens, the church in Hong Kong is facing unstable conditions and civil unrest, with economic downturns, layoffs, corporate failures, etc. – and that is not even including the impact of the pandemic.

Facing the unknowable uncertainty in front of us, we can learn from the Chinese church during the Cultural Revolution in China. The number of Christians in the Chinese church was about 90 000 in 1900, rose to one million in 1949, and then during the very hard years of the Cultural Revolution rose to 10 million by 1996, and 17 million in 2006. Although religion was severely restricted in China through the entire century, Christianity still has vitality and influence in China, in many small unregistered churches. Unofficial figures estimate that there are more than 40 million Christians in China today.

There is hope for Hong Kong churches, even though we may live in the future with much more uncertainty and restrictions on our churches, losing our comfortable freedoms. The church can thrive and grow in spite of many restrictions, as we have seen in China.

— *Jeremiah Choi, Hong Kong Mennonite Church*

A church of peace

Indonesia is the country in the world with the largest number of Muslims. There are three Anabaptist conferences in Indonesia, totalling about 110 000 adult members. One of these is Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ), the oldest Anabaptist national church/synod, with the first believers baptized in 1854. Christians are a very small minority in Indonesia – about 10% of the total population. In some times and places there has been violence directed towards Christian churches in parts of Indonesia.

Around 2009, GITJ in the city of Jepara formulated the vision and mission to be a church of peace in the city. In the context of the plurality of religious life in Jepara, proclaiming peace

means building good relationships with other religious brothers and sisters. Of the 1.1 million inhabitants in the district of Jepara, the vast majority of the population is Muslim. The church understands that peace is not just that there is no conflict or little conflict. Peace means there are good relationships, interrelationships with mutual trust, even though there are differences.



**Harjo Suyitno designed the “cosmic Christ” cross artwork at Jepara GITJ church in Indonesian *gunungan* style.
Photo: Karla Braun**

Therefore, we are trying to build relationships with other religious organizations, namely Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara (NU). It is very close to the church – only about 500 meters away – but we had never cooperated with each other. There has not been much friction, but there has also been no communication. Some occasional communication took place in the realm of the elite, the leaders, which do not reflect the grassroots. We want peace not just to be a factual agenda for figures in meeting forums, but also to become a daily interaction among the people.

For this reason, we made a personal approach to the head of the Indonesian Muslim Cultural Arts Institute (LESBUMI), an art and cultural institution under NU, to stay in touch and share views on peace that can be made together. We decided to hold a traditional music



(*keroncong*) performance on the terrace of the NU building while it was filled with light discussion. We deliberately used cultural media because art and culture can bring people together. Our goal is for people to meet one another and communicate with one another naturally. But apparently only church people came to this first event. Muslims did not want to come. That confirms that there are indeed suspicions and stereotypes among the people. Even the chairman of LESBUMI received a reprimand for inviting Christians to the NU building.

has continued, involving women and children. For example, church women helped to prepare food assistance in the NU building together with Muslim women to be sent to communities impacted by the pandemic. Children also take part in celebrating International Peace Day, young people are involved in peace watch, and so on.

The result is that now the relationship between the GITJ congregation and Muslims in Jepara is working well.

In GITJ, we also work to have good relations with colleagues in the Sufi and Shia Islamic traditions, which are smaller groups within the Muslim community. Several times, we held camps for friendship across different faiths for young people. Some time ago in a discipleship class at church, we invited fellow Muslims to deliver material about Jesus Christ from their Islamic perspective. This is very important so that the congregation can understand from them directly. This is an indicator of mutual respect as friends and relatives.



Children's choir at GITJ Kelet, Indonesia. Photo: supplied

Nevertheless, there were also some people who were attracted by this idea and continued to the next meeting, namely the commemoration of an Indonesian holiday (Kartini Day) at the NU building, which was enlivened by several church bands. This time, many people came and the media also responded very well, because something like this had never before taken place.

Furthermore, the church routinely holds International Peace Day every 21 September in front of the church building, by presenting artistic and cultural performances from various religions, as well as peace speeches from several groups.

Our goal is still the same, namely to bring Muslim and Christian people together informally to interact with one another. The collaboration

In building relationships between faiths, mutual trust, mutual acceptance and mutual participation are very important. Relationships are more focused on friendly relationships, rather than formal institutional relationships. Through this friendly personal relationship, there is a spirit to learn from each other humbly, there is courage to cross the walls of suspicion that have built up. There is indeed a risk of being misunderstood, but there will never be a crossing of the boundaries without the courage to step up.

Mutual trust was demonstrated when Pastor Danang Kristiawan was ordained as Jepara pastor in 2013. Friends from across the diverse Jepara community came and shared "offerings" in the form of a Sufi dance, poems delivered by politician Budi Harjono, and a Christian Taize song sung by a theology student accompanied by violins played by Muslims and piano played



by the pastor of a charismatic church in Jepara. This all happened spontaneously and became a beautiful surprise.

Likewise, when the brothers and sisters at the Islamic boarding school held a grand recitation, they also invited people from the church, who were even given the opportunity to deliver a message. This has also happened with Shiite Islamic groups who often in Indonesia receive discriminatory treatment.

Dialogue, visiting each other, discussing with each other about peace issues continue to grow. In the experience of meeting, eating together, playing together, and being a connecting bridge among different religious communities, we can be amazed to see the face of God in our fellow human beings.

— *MZ Ichsanudin, MWC Executive Committee member, GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa), Semarang, Indonesia*

Kindness during lockdown

“We had only rice provided by the state government nothing else and we were having only rice for many days. I was concerned how to feed my family during this lockdown period. I am a daily wage labourer. During this time, our pastor came with a bag and told me this is for your family from our brothers and sisters from Mennonite church Rajnandgaon (a congregation of Mennonite Church in India). When we opened the bag, it was full with groceries and other necessary items we needed the most. We were in need and God provided our need.”

— *Rahul, a member of Mennonite Church, Kanker*

“The grocery items were enough for many days.”

— *Mrs. Ashrita Dyal, member of Mennonite Church, Kusumkasa, a 69-year-old widow who lives by herself.*

“We were going through hard times, we needed food, and our need was met by our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

— *Pastor Rohit Markam, an independent church pastor in Bhanupratappur.*

There are many stories like these. God does this when we open our hearts to kindness.

As a church, we have been asking the Lord to give us sensitivity to care for people around us in this time of pandemic. With a small amount, we planned to meet the immediate needs of our brothers and sisters located in villages who are without work during the lockdown. The state government is providing only rice, so we thought of providing other food items and other necessary items of daily use. We requested the pastors of Mennonite congregations located in village areas to visit and find out about families who are in need. This small effort has met the need of 67 families.



Gilgal Mission Trust congregation, January 2016.
Photo: Arli Klassen

The best thing that happened to us is that we protected our hearts from getting cold towards the needs of people around us.

— *Vikal Pravin Rao, Mennonite Church in India, Rajnandgaon, India*



Living water testimony

India is a country full of colours, different castes and religions, all presenting different kinds of barriers that keep people separated. In South India, the caste-related barriers are very strong.

Mrs. Elizabeth Karupatthal is a member in Gilgal Mission Church who has touched many people in her village through witnessing to Christ in her life. She comes from a traditional Hindu high caste, Goundar, which is strong in religious rituals. As a high caste person, she was proud of her identity. She is a wealthy woman in her village. She has two sons and one daughter, and all of them are married and living in big cities in India. She lives alone in her hometown at Madathukulam.

In this story, her neighbors and her enemies took revenge on her because of her wealth and status by using witchcraft to place a curse on her. She went to all the temples and did many of her rituals, but she found no cure.

Within this hopeless situation, she was brought to the church by one believer. As a whole church, they start to pray for healing for her. Through the prayer, she was completely healed from the evil spirit.

Then she started to come to church and feel the presence of God in her heart. After a few months, she took baptism and accepted Christ as her Saviour. But due to the cultural and religious barriers after baptism, she was rejected by her children and their families and her neighbours. The high caste community thinks of Christians as untouchables because they always work for the development and upliftment for people living in poverty.

But Elizabeth was very strong in her conviction that Jesus Christ helped her to overcome all problems in her life.

However, in the church during the communion service, once again the cultural barrier started to overcome her mind as the church took part in breaking bread and taking wine in one shared glass. As a high caste person, many questions arose in her mind regarding sharing communion from one glass and one loaf of bread. At first, she was very confused about how to think about this. Later, she understood that Jesus not only solved her own problems, but that Jesus died for everyone, in order to break all the barriers in each and everyone's life, and to be freed from all the so-called barriers in this world, including the barriers of caste.

After this incident, she started to attend all prayer cell groups in different community members' homes regardless of their caste, and she happily started to share about the love of God, who breaks all kinds of barriers in our lives for our betterment. Through her testimony, she was able to bring three families to Christ and all of them were baptized very recently.

At first, she thought of Jesus as a problem-solver for herself, but later she came to understand that Jesus is not a God for a specific community or caste or person. Jesus came to this world to show the love of God by breaking all cultural, political, spiritual and economical barriers to unite us in Christ. At present, she started a small prayer cell in her home for all kinds of community members to come and pray to know more about Jesus.

— Paul Phinehas, MWC Executive Committee member, and head of Gilgal Mission Trust, Kerala, India



Cultural contributions from Asia

1. In India many congregations follow the tradition of “no shoes/footwear” on the platform and many in the more rural areas do not allow any shoes in the entire building. MWC congregations around the world are invited to share in this practice on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.

- The place of worship is considered holy and the feet being dirty, therefore the shoes are removed outside the door.
- Some congregations wear shoes only when going up to the pulpit to speak because that is seen to honour God, just like Moses was asked to remove his shoes when encountering the burning bush.
- Some congregations have people sit on the floor during worship: for practical reasons of cleanliness and hygiene, shoes are removed before entering the church.
- Some congregations follow this practice with the intention to communicate that Christianity is not just a western religion, but is rooted in local customs and traditions. This tradition is respectful of the Hindu religion where shoes/sandals are considered unclean because they are made out of leather from the cow, a holy animal in the Hindu faith. Hindus always remove their shoes when entering their temples, and many Christians do the same when entering their own places of worship.

2. In Indonesia, the congregation that worships in the Holy Stadium in Semarang (Jemaat Kristen Indonesia – JKI) includes dancers during the worship through music. This introduces creative, expressive art and provides another “language” to worship the Lord. An expression of the heart, movements symbolize honour, adoration, joy and thanksgiving. Dance can include tambourine,



Worship dancers at JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang, Indonesia.
Photo: supplied

ribbons, banners and other objects. Movements are usually structured with specific meanings; the patterns are familiar across churches. The dance team follows the lead of the worship leader and music director, united in one heart to glorify God and to usher the congregants into God’s presence.

Watch here: youtu.be/dBPIkyFeloA

3. Member churches in Asia do not use any of the three official languages in MWC. Their worship music includes many songs that are not translated into any of MWC’s 3 languages. These are videos of songs frequently used in local congregations which MWC congregations are encouraged to use during their own worship, as prelude or postlude or during the service.

- “Within the life”, Indonesian song mwc-cmm.org/resources/dalam-kehidupan
- “May the Spirit’s fire revive me again”, Chinese song from Hong Kong: youtu.be/tAj8sUr64ww
- “God how good you are”, Hindi song from India, youtu.be/T4SrV5LU7JI
- “All glory to our heavenly father”, Tamil song from India, youtu.be/CaN80mKV3DY



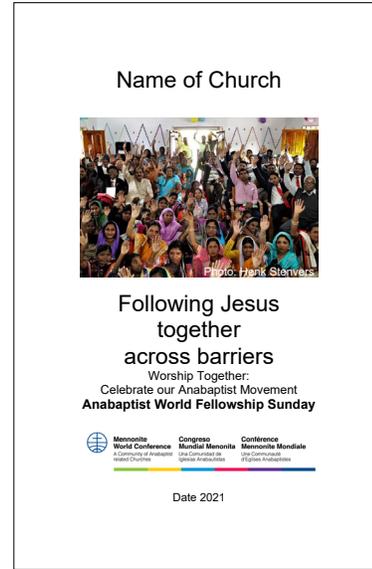
Additional resources

Poster A



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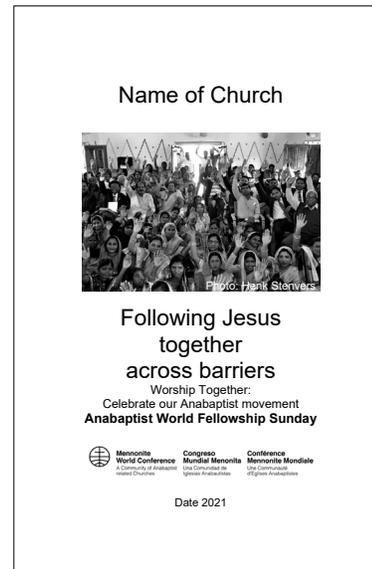


Sample bulletin cover: colour version.
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Poster B



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