



**Mennonite
World Conference**

A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**

Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**

Une Communauté
d'Eglises Anabaptistes

Worship Resource

World Fellowship Sunday January 27, 2013

Each year Mennonite World Conference (MWC) encourages Anabaptist-related churches around the world to worship around a common theme, on a Sunday close to January 21. On that day, in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland.

World Fellowship Sunday provides an opportunity to remember common roots and celebrate worldwide *koinonia* (community) by planning a worship service that will help participants enter into fellowship, intercession and thanksgiving with the global faith family.

The 2013 worship materials below include biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions and sermon ideas. They are the fruit of the joint work of members of Colombia's three MWC member churches: Iglesia Christiana Menonita (Mennonite Church), Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo (Brethren in Christ) and Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren).

Note that the material is also available on the MWC website, in English, French and Spanish: www.mwc-cmm.org.

Theme: Justice and the Witness of the Church Today

The issue of justice gives rise to discussions within all kinds of contexts. God's justice is often contrary to human beings' understanding of justice. We need to understand God's vision and desire for justice as we seek to know him. God's own Word tells us that our thoughts are not his thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9) unless these are renewed by him (Romans 12:1-2).

Government authorities and religious leaders are challenged to promote justice among peoples and communities, but they often fail. Jesus' followers, therefore, need to live out and proclaim God's authentic justice in a world where many forms of injustice exist.

1. **Opening:** We have gathered on this day of Anabaptist World Fellowship to celebrate together God's love for humanity, manifest in his purpose of justice for all. As disciples of Jesus, bearers of a message of justice, let us testify to this purpose through our commitment and message to humanity.
2. **Opening prayer:** Invite a young person to lead this prayer.

"God of justice and mercy, who has shown us the way of humility, we have gathered on this day to receive your Word. Let it guide us in putting into practice one of your qualities and desires: justice. Our hearts suffer as we observe the unjust world in which we live and want to bear testimony to all those who doubt you."

Congregational response:

"We direct our praise and prayers to you with gratitude and love, for all eternity. Amen."

3. **Songs:** Each congregation should choose songs and hymns that fit with the theme and with their tradition. Spanish songs suggested by the planning group include:
 - ✓ *Buscad primero el Reino de Dios* (traditional; *Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God*)
 - ✓ *Las cimas andinas* (author: Santiago Benavides)
 - ✓ *Tenemos Esperanza* (*Why We Have Hope*, by Federico Pagura; for English translation and video see <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.ca/2010/07/tenemos-esperanza-why-we-have-hope.html>)
4. **Stories or testimonies:** Ask two or three persons ahead of time to prepare testimonies (old or recent) that reflect the commitment of Anabaptist individuals or communities in the struggle for justice in local and other contexts. Instead, or in addition, a video or photographic exhibition of these testimonies can be shown.
5. **Bible readings:** Invite different members of the community to participate in these readings: Micah 6:6-8; Psalm 103:1-6; Mathew 5:1-10.
6. **Message outline:** Based on Micah 6:8 and John 8.3-11.

Theme: God's Justice Restores

- a) **Introduction:** In most of our societies, the notion that justice means retribution has predominated. In the prophetic message of the Bible and in Jesus, however, we find another paradigm: restorative justice.
- b) **Comparison between retributive and restorative justice:** Restorative justice recognizes that in a conflict, whether interpersonal or social, broken relationships exist. In the process of doing justice, people and their needs are central, and justice is more than simply compliance with a legal and institutional framework. Retributive justice is based on safeguarding the legal order of a society and punishing the offenders without regard for the reparation and restitution of persons and broken relationships in a conflict.
- c) **Jesus' example in John 8:3-11:** In this passage Jesus takes a restorative position when faced with a woman accused of adultery. Jesus does not justify her action, yet he is interested in her as a person and her need to be restored. Moses' law considered the option of stoning and condemning her alone. Although there was another person involved, only she was held responsible. Jesus showed another option: God's justice that restores.
- d) **The prophet Micah issues God's call for mercy and humility before God:** Those who intend to do justice or promote justice must consider God's other two demands: mercy and humility. Mercy implies our ability to put ourselves in the place of others before judging them, to know their particular situation and needs, and to deeply feel what is happening to them and their reality, seeking only their well-being. Humility before God involves the ability to recognize our own mistakes before judging those of others; to desist from our individualistic pretensions and to think about others; to recognize our inabilities before God; and to depend on God in our judgments and actions.
- e) **Conclusion:** In the present, as in the past, the community of Jesus' disciples is called to exercise justice that restores. To achieve this we must learn to see others with eyes of mercy and to humbly recognize our need for God. We can promote justice and be witnesses to justice according to God's heart only if we exercise Micah's demands and follow Jesus' example in our life and actions.

7. **Prayer of confession:** Here we express the ways in which we have acted in an unjust manner, both as individuals and as a community. Ask different persons in the community to express, through prayer, responsibility for various injustices that you have observed in your local, national or world context.
8. **Prayer of petition:** In prayer, present the requests of the Anabaptist world community that our communities may become better witnesses of justice, that we may commit ourselves to exercise restorative justice at all levels of our relationships.
9. **Offering:** Ask the congregation, “What could we contribute on a personal, family or ecclesiastical level in order to promote God’s restorative justice?” Suggestion: Have the congregation write their commitment on the worship bulletin or a piece of paper and present it to the Lord in prayer.
10. **Closing:** Song (suggestion: *Padre, quiero alabarte. Song #5 in the International Songbook from Paraguay 2009*) and final blessing. Ask God that our communities all over the world may witness to justice. You may point out a concrete situation of injustice (whether economic injustice or the way women and children are mistreated). Then, as a local community, commit ourselves to work for change.
11. **Follow up:** Encourage your local church community to share with other communities at national and world levels – to exchange notes about the commitments you expressed in the offering time. Commit yourselves to pray for each other during the year.