



**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

Peace Sunday 2014

Introduction

This Peace Sunday worship material is provided by the Peace Commission of Mennonite World Conference. We encourage its use by all MWC-related congregations on the designated Peace Sunday (21 September 2014), or another Sunday that fits the schedule of the congregation.

This year's material was prepared by the Brethren in Christ Church in Nepal. It reflects many years of struggle and persecution, and the lessons, perspectives, and images that have helped them through very difficult times.

We are grateful to Pastor Shemlal Hembrom, and the team that collaborated with him in the production of this material. Pastor Shemlal is the President of the Brethren in Christ Church of Nepal.

We are grateful to God who has sustained this church during times of suffering and difficulty. We trust that we can all be nurtured by the faithfulness of this sister church, and by the same God whose presence has been so evident in the life of these, our brothers and sisters from Nepal. – Peace Commission, MWC

Theme: Prayer and praise – the spirituality of peace

Suggested texts

Primary text: Acts 12:1-17

Supporting texts: Acts 16:25-34; John 20:19-31; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 4:4-6;
Colossians 3:12-14; Matthew 5:44-45; I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Focus statement

In the midst of problems, suffering, and persecutions we can celebrate the goodness of God, sing hymns of praise to God, and pray to God with one voice. God gives joy and peace to us - and even to our enemies.

Primary image: a chain

In the Bible, chains are used to symbolize both the good and the bad things.

We invite you to explore the image of the chain as an illustration that peace, joy, suffering, and persecution can exist in the same time and place together. The important lesson from Nepal is that our experience and expression of praise, celebration, and joy do not need to wait until persecution and suffering has subsided.

Chains were used to bind prisoners and to take away their freedom (Acts 12). They are symbols of



bondage to sin, and the brokenness of our world. Chains are a sign of slavery.

But a chain linked together in a circle can symbolize the way prayer can bind us together in unity in spite of diversity and hardship. It also symbolizes the strength we have together in the face of persecution and suffering, a strength of unity that inspires us to pray for our enemies too (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Music Suggestions

Songs should be chosen by the worship planners. It is good to choose songs that focus on the close connection between prayer and peace, and spirituality and active engagement for peace.

For example:

- Bind us together Lord... (English.)
- Bondage of sin is broken
I became free, yes free...(Hindi)
- Watch the wonders of creation
and the greatness of our Lord (Nepali)

Worship for all ages or time with children

Today we will learn about the power of prayer in times of persecution and troubles.

- First, let us all be silent together. Think of all your family, friends, relatives, and neighbours, and church and what they are facing and needing. Think also of others far away and the needs that they are facing. And think of the world, and the suffering and persecution that many experience.
- Second, on a piece of paper, in different colors, draw circles – like links of a chain. Each circle symbolizes one of the needs that you identified in the silence.
- Third, let's all hold hands and make a circle like the chain we have drawn. Let's pray together for each link believing that God has the power to release his people from all kind of problems when we pray together with one voice.

Sermon notes

Persecution brings unrest, loneliness, fear and dispersion. But at the same time it gives birth to prayer movements that unite us in spite of our many differences and difficulties.

In the book of Acts, the theme of peace and joy during persecution reminds us of the peace of our Risen Lord Jesus who overcomes suffering and death for the sake of humanity (John 20:19-31; I Corinthians 15:56-57). Therefore we need not be paralyzed by worries, but pray and rejoice in Him for the victory is ahead.

Throughout the history of the early church we find that God's presence and peace has been with his chosen people in the midst of difficulties. The chosen people then become the source of peace to the rest of the world, a peace that included miracles through the power of prayer.

In Nepal there was persecution of Christian believers because of their faith. Some church leaders were killed, others were threatened by death. Churches were bombed. God's people organized a chain of prayer and fasting. All the believers across the country of Nepal gathered in different places to pray together with one unified voice. The results were miraculous: many believers escaped persecution and were saved. Many of the persecutors found the peace and joy of trusting in Jesus. In Nepal we experienced firsthand the way in which Peter, Paul, and Silas were released from their chains, and at the same time the jailer and his whole family were saved. The jailer who was frightened and was trying to kill himself found the peace offered by Christ.

God invites us to come together in unity for prayer with one another. This demands humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. We are all called – each one – to unity through the bond of peace. Who do you know that is persecuted? Who are the frightened, the homeless, the orphan, the widow, the old aged, the sick, the broken-hearted, and those in poverty? God is with all these people. God answers prayer (Matthew 18:18-20),

and people are released from the bondage and released from fear. They can experience peace and joy in trusting Christ.

Response Options

1) Ritual of Anointing

In the midst of difficulty in prison Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Miraculously their chains came loose and they became the source of peace and joy to the jailer and his whole family by trusting God.

As we sing hymns of praise let us bring to our mind all those whose chains need to be unlocked.

- Make available coloured bands that fit around the wrists of participants;
- Lead the congregation through either foot or hand washing ritual (or both);
- Upon finishing the washing, place a coloured band around the wrist of your washing partner;
- As you place the band on the wrist, repeat to him/her:
“You are called to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-6), to serve and pray in unity for those who are in chains/bondage of darkness, persecution, and suffering.”
- When all have received a band, read in unison Matthew 5:9:
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

1) Other suggestions: Getting people involved

Before or after the service:

- Invite each person to bring a wristband and have someone in the congregation join these together into a chain. Use this chain on the day of celebration to demonstrate and symbolize our unity in diversity amid the various types of problems that people are facing.
- Organize a prayer chain, making sure to include every member of the congregation. Make a list of specific items that each one should pray for. This could include specific persons, family, church, conference, and problems of the society, the nation, and the world.
- Encourage the congregation to be a part of a local project for building peace in your neighborhood.
- Bring your chain-links to the celebration, each one representing a promise of peacemaking. Put these in the offering, as your gift to God for the sake of peace.

Benediction: I Peter 5:10-11

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Material prepared for the glory of God by Pastor Shemlal Hembrom, President of the Brethren in Christ Church of Nepal and his team of collaborators