



**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 2015 Seek the Peace of the City (Jeremiah 29:7)

Introduction

These Peace Sunday worship resources are provided by the Peace Commission of Mennonite World Conference. We encourage their use by all MWC-related congregations on the designated Peace Sunday (20 September 2015), or another Sunday that fits the schedule of the congregation. This year's material was prepared by Mennonites in Europe. God has sustained the Mennonite presence in Europe through times of suffering and difficulty for nearly 500 years. Resources included are: a responsive reading, sermon notes, stories and pictures. We trust that we can all be nurtured by the faithfulness of these brothers and sisters. – *Peace Commission, MWC*

Theme: Boundaries and Borders

Suggested Texts

Primary text: Jeremiah 29: 1-7

Supporting texts: Matthew 27:28-31, and Revelation 1:12-18

Focus Statement

God overcomes boundaries when God's people are willing to step over the many things that divide us.

Context: Stepping over Boundaries – Overcoming Boundaries

Refugees come across the boundaries to Europe, and our boundaries in the Mediterranean Sea become their death traps. People from Africa and the Middle East set out for better lands, forced by hardships with many causes. Because the boundaries are closed for them, the crossing must take place unseen. In the transition between the homeland left behind and the hoped for destination, these closed boundaries induce those in flight to entrust their fate to facilitators. It has been known for long just how dangerous these crossings over the open sea are, a few hundred kilometers in overloaded and hardly seaworthy boats. Sometimes, the facilitators send them in rubber dinghies on the dangerous journey that literally faces death. How desperate must people be who despite these dangers



*A woman from Basel, Switzerland enjoys to knit in her free time. She joined a knitting campaign by a relief group. She took her wool with her on a holiday in Greece. As she sits knitting on the beach, enjoying the sunset, she sees something floating far out in the sea. "It looks like a piece of wood" she guesses. The next day, she learns that a refugee, probably from Syria, had drowned and had been swept on land. This experience touches her soul, as she knits socks for Syrian refugees. – Marianne Rediger, Bern, Switzerland. **See more stories and photos below.***

put their hope in this journey?

They are fleeing because others draw boundaries that exclude them and take away their space for living and any right to life. There are those who want the boundaries between religions and affiliations to be clear and sharp, as in Ukraine, Syria and Nigeria, and many other places.

Refugees who seek to establish a new place to live, intrude into our space: Will we also open up the boundaries of our spaces to live? What do we see in them? People that want to participate in our welfare? Not all in Europe are doing well – does the need and hardship of those newly arriving exceed our limits? Or do we see humans that will seek - together with us - the good, the welfare of our lands and cities? Bring new potential with them? Do we only hear what they ask from us, or do we also see what life-power could come with them? Martina Basso from the Mennonite Peace Center Berlin invites us with stimulating thoughts on Jeremiah 29:4-7 to a new perspective, that challenge both, refugees and those granting refuge, to find a new common ground.

Churches step over boundaries when they grant Church Asylum to people threatened by deportation. They thus question the constitutional state whether its legal practice really lives up to humane justice. Reports from Germany show the persisting actuality of this old tradition.

By far not all decide to leave their hardship. In the regions of East-Ukraine where the fights between Pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army turn villages and cities to battle fields, there many do not accept the new boundaries that are being drawn. They stay and resist the insanity of those nationalisms. They resist hatred and divisions, forces that are also present in church communities. When we decide to support our brothers and sisters in the Ukraine, to assist them in their struggle to find the right ways in these situations filled with tension, then we too must probably leave the comfort zones of secure distance. We in the West might not want to believe that violence will lead to peace: but this is not much help to those who come to know separatists as their enemies that would want to take their space for living. And who thankfully support their own soldiers as protectors against them. How to find the way to peace in this labyrinth?

When Ukrainian people connect the resurrection of Christ with their hope for a resurrection of the Ukraine, then this too steps over thresholds. Hope breaks in, and this hope does not accept the limits of nationalism, on either side, it does not accept that communities of life are destroyed altogether. The poverty that comes with the war oversteps the threshold of humanity but there remains with us Christ disrobed, and with him the hope for resurrection.

Donations cross boundaries and connect people to each other: In the relief group of the Swiss Mennonite Conference, women sew quilts and invest many hours of work; in Syria these quilts do not only help to keep warm. Their beauty gives back something of human dignity that so often gets lost where pure survival has to be secured. These are border-crossings that also step over the boundaries on the side of those who receive, boundaries between groups and religions, as various population groups and religious communities receive help from the same partners.

Weapons also cross boundaries: Those who export weapons can no longer control in whose hands they will end up. Swiss Mennonites campaign against a loosening of the regulations concerning the exports of weapons because any loosening will lead to more weapons being circulated. Relief goes hand in hand with fighting that which creates the needs.

God overcomes boundaries when he becomes man and allows himself to be stripped and disrobed. The glorified Son of Man and the humbled Christ meet. The disrobed Christ walks alongside the marginalized, suffers the hardship of war, cries out in the affliction of the despaired. Yet he carries and retains the hope of the glorified Son of Man.

With these materials the Mennonites of Europe invite the worldwide Mennonite community to connect God's overcoming of boundaries with the border-crossings among us people. In these worship materials, you will find a sermon from Jeremiah 29:4-7, a liturgy, and stories from Ukraine, Germany, and Switzerland. – *Jürg Bräker, general secretary KMS (Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz)*

Story: Syrian in Switzerland quilts for her home country

Muttenz, Switzerland – There is a difference of opinion when it comes to colour choice in the quilting group at Brügg Mennonite Church. For Gulschin Ibrahim, the Swiss tendency to choose similar tones and colours is a bit boring. In Syria, where Ibrahim is from, people like brighter shades, and more of them.

“She tells us we’re doing the colours all wrong,” says Margrit Amstutz with a laugh. Amstutz is in the same quilting group.

Of course the disagreement on colours is more of a joke – it doesn’t stop the group from sewing and donating quilts to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). After all, it was sending blankets to Syria that made Ibrahim, who left Syria before the war, join the group in the first place.

Though she doesn’t attend the Mennonite church, Ibrahim was invited to join the quilters after meeting Therese Broglie at an event in support of undocumented immigrants and refugees.

“Therese told me they’re doing things for Syria,” says Ibrahim. “Syria is my country and I’d like to help my people.”

The group is one of three in Switzerland making quilts for Syria, where more than 7.5 million people are internally displaced and over 12 million need assistance.

Swiss Mennonite churches worked with congregations in France to ship one container of relief supplies to Syria through MCC in January, 2013. The shipment contained 1,500 hygiene kits, 65 hand-made quilts, 294 purchased blankets, 791 relief kits and 144 pairs of hand-made socks along with other supplies like towels and sheets. They are now collecting contents for another.

But since quilting is not a traditional craft in Switzerland, people wondered why the group would use small squares for the comforters instead of making simpler blankets. “People thought we were crazy,” says Amstutz. Others said they should “just take a duvet cover or a wool blanket, and put fleece together, put big pieces and be done.”

But she told her church that the small details are significant. “I said for people in war it’s important that we make a nice blanket,” says Amstutz. “It’s important that they realize that it’s something beautiful that people made for them.”

Throughout the sewing process, quilters often think about Syria and why the blankets are needed. Those thoughts stay with Broglie even when she’s not cutting fabric or tying quilts. “What particularly reinforces this thinking about it throughout the week is that Gulschin is in our group, who’s from Syria, and we know what this war means for this family and for her and we see how they suffer even at a distance,” she says.

Quilting is a way that Broglie can show compassion for those who are suffering, even from her home in Switzerland. “It’s an opportunity to live my faith. It’s not just a construct of ideas, it’s something that is practical. To live the love that we talk about.” – *Article by Emily Loewen, MCC. The photos related to this story are from MCC and the SMM Relief Group of the Swiss Mennonite Conference.*)



Syrian Orthodox Bishop Jean receives quilts at the Mennonite congregation in Muttenz



Distribution of quilts to refugees in Middle East

Stories: Socks and Blankets for Syria, a campaign by the SMM Relief Group

In a remote region in the Middle East, refugees receive materials from MCC, among others also quilted comforters. They do not have a name for these blankets nor were "Mennonites" known among them before. After a while, a few other refugees from the region came and asked whether they could change some wool blankets that they had received earlier from other organizations, for a "Mennonite". They said that these "Mennonites" would give much better warmth, and that they were so beautiful that one could even hang them up in the tent during the day. – *Mari Friesen, Muttenz, Switzerland*

This summer, Hanni, a 81 years woman old from our church, a diligent knitter, once told me: "Now I have done another five." She meant wool blankets of a certain size. She had knitted some already before that. Beginning September, Hanni was diagnosed with a very malignant cancer. In the hospital she told me: "Now I am working on the twelfth one ... but, will that one yet be finished?" Four weeks after the diagnosis we had to bury Hanni. At the funeral, I was allowed to lay the unfinished blanket on the pulpit. Hanni had drawn many threads to other peoples lives. Near and far she had enriched people with warmth and love. One of Hannis daughters has four daughters. They now want to continue and finish the blanket. – *Nelly Gerber, Tramelan, Switzerland*

(The above stories are excerpted from the SMM Newsletter January 2015.)

Story: Tradition of Church Asylum has become important again

Since the dramatic increase over the last years of refugees coming to Europe, the tradition of Church Asylum has become more important again in Germany.

Under certain circumstances, churches grant asylum under their roof to person whose application for asylum has been rejected by the state. Some Mennonite churches in Germany are also involved in this. Because of certain regulations by the state it can happen that people are sent back to countries from which they have fled because of persecution. The risk of them being persecuted again is condoned. In such cases, churches sometimes receive persons in their buildings and thus protect them from being deported.

These actions occur in a legal twilight zone and were harshly criticized by the German Ministry of the Interior. The churches were accused of establishing a religiously founded parallel legal system. But the effort to fight for the place of Church Asylum was worth it, although the tensions have not altogether disappeared.

So *Kirchenasyl.de* reports: "The *Ökumenische Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft (BAG) Asyl in der Kirche* appreciates that the tradition of Church Asylum is no longer questioned by the Ministry of the Interior nor by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Meaning and necessity of Church Asylum lie in the fact that in some cases it protects people from being deported into situations where their lives would be threatened or their human rights violated. In this function, Church Asylum has proved its worth, as has shown its high rate of success." – *From the March 2015 newsletter, DMFK (German Mennonite Peace Committee)*

Stories and Reflections: Ukraine

1. Greetings my friends....Just returned home, and trying to put my thoughts and emotional conditions in order. On the way to the bank I stopped to talk with a local businessman. I've known him for a long time, we discussed the economic situation, since we both are involved in business. Then we touched on the situation in the Eastern part of Ukraine. We learned that we belong to different camps, he is aggressively pro-Russian and I am pro-Ukrainian (but not aggressively). His face and emotions were totally confused, when he learned that I think differently. We had no pleasant conversation, even though I never insisted on my point of view. Our conversation ended with his phrase: 'First thing I will do if Russian forces get to our town, is burn down your computer store'. I do not fear whether he will do it. What I realized is how people's minds are spoiled. They are ready to do evil things to innocent people, just to defend their point of view. I wonder, how many people in my city think like that, how dangerous it is for us to stay in case Russia moves any further. Sad....

2. Peter Dudnik [pastor of Good News congregation in Slaviansk] made [towards the end of the interview] a particularly memorable statement [concerning the propaganda on both sides]: “If your heart harbors hate, then the devil has already neutralized you. People might still come to church and practice their usual religious activities. But if hate has taken hold of their hearts, then they are nothing more than spiritual corpses.” The pastor stated at the end of the interview: “If you see people’s pain, then the question of who might be the guilty party is no longer important. Then only the following question matters: How can I stop the suffering?” A mindset like this one would lead inevitably to a closing of the ranks between Ukrainians and Russians. – *From a report about a visit in Slaviansk, by William Yoder, Berlin/Moscow, April 2015.*



Poverty, destruction and resistance. Old woman collecting macaroni in a destroyed military base in Ukraine. Source: unknown

3. Good Friday and Easter belong together. Hope confronts the suffering – translated for today: Good Friday demonstrates that when we stumble, we can rise again. Our small relief organization in the Ukraine was founded by physicians to fight tuberculosis. Now, together with our Ukrainian friends, we also help the refugees who come from East-Ukraine to West-Ukraine. Once or twice a year I travel to the Ukraine, people there are not doing well. They have had massive losses. Brothers fall in war and young men are recruited. They say that the history of Ukraine has been a perpetual Good Friday. But after the short time of independence now the situation has become worse. From the east looms a Good Friday without the prospect of a resurrection. Nevertheless, also in times of crises, Easter is always with them. Particularly in this time they want to celebrate a bright feast of Easter, with the consecrated Easter bread ‘Pascha’ and the beautifully painted Easter eggs, which are true works of art. The unofficial motto of our friends is *Christos woskres – woskresne Ukraina* (Christ has risen – Ukraine will rise). This shows how tightly these people connect the Easter event with the political situation. – *From the Magazin Doppelpunkt, Nr. 14/2015, by the theologian Dorothea Loosli-Amstutz, project manager of the relief organization Bär & Leu (“bear and lion”) in the Ukraine and an elder in the Bern Mennonite Church.*

Responsive Reading: from Matthew 27: 28-31, and Revelation 1:12-18 (NRSV)

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,
His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire,

and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head.
his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace.

They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him
and his voice was like the sound of many waters.

and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’
In his right hand he held seven stars.

They spat on him,
and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword,
and took the reed and struck him on the head.

And his face was like the sun shining with full force.

Then they led him away to crucify him.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades...

[Intercessions]

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow;

his eyes were like a flame of fire,

and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head.

his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace,

They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him

and his voice was like the sound of many waters.

and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'

In his right hand he held seven stars,

They spat on him

and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword,

and took the reed and struck him on the head.

and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

Then they led him away to crucify him.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid;

I am the first and the last, and the living one.

I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever.

Sermon Notes: Seek the Peace of the City (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

The Israelites, at least a big number of the so called Jerusalem upper-class, had lost their home. They had lost Jerusalem, their hometown, and the temple, the place where they were sure of the closeness of God. And now they sit by the rivers of Babylon and cry. They cry because they aren't allowed anymore to live and to pray at those places which had been their home.

When I visit elderly persons in my congregation I sometimes listen to their stories of displacements at the end of World War II. The pictures of their native places are still vivid in their memories: The wavy cornfields, the farms, and the sea. Concrete places, from which there were driven off with only what they were able to carry in their hands.

The pictures of the homeless of our days on TV are pictures of the refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, Sudan and so on. For all of them home is first of all a place. The place where they were raised, where they lived and worked. The place where they were not able to remain because of war and rebellion.

And there are those who leave their home because they don't see any perspective for living anymore. We find them on unseaworthy boats, in custody pending deportation, in poor dwellings in the big cities. For them home wasn't a worthy living place anymore. They left to find a new and better life.

And finally there are those who left their hometown by choice, without emergency. Because they were curious for new places.

Home – what is it about home?

The letter of Jeremiah must have been a provocation for the Israelites, displaced, complaining, and homesick. Jeremiah requests them to take roots in the outland and to pray for the place of their exile, to stop thinking about the former home. There in the outland, at the inhospitable place, they listen and read the appeal of the prophet.

Similar sounding are the words of Jesus in the sermon of the mount: "Love your enemies. Pray for those, who are tracking you." Don't quarrel with your situation. Come to terms with it. Rethink. Think forward. Don't think back.

Was this not just asking too much for the Israelites crying by the rivers of Babylon? Isn't this too cruel a message in the face of the Syrian in their refugee camps in the heat? Wasn't

it nearly the same for those expelled Germans who wanted to go back years after their escape?

Babylon, symbol for the exile, for loss of home, for uprooting and alienation, has many names.

In the situation of exile the prophet Jeremiah gives the message: "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer. 29:7).

In other words: Don't be overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world, be somebody standing with, be a shaper, be a peace-seeker.

What does it mean in your context: "And seek the peace of the city"?

What does it mean to make room for those seeking the "welfare of the city"?

Sermon Notes by Martina Basso, pastor, Mennonite Peace Center Berlin

Biblical Blessings and Benedictions of Peace

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

"The God of peace be with all of you. Amen" (Romans 15:33).

Above Biblical texts are from the New Revised Standard Version.