



**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

2015 World Fellowship Sunday – Regional Focus: North America

Theme: What in the World is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom theme is prominent in Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Jesus emphasized that the Kingdom had come with His coming, and now the Church is called to bring in the Kingdom that He talked about and prayed for.

Our global Anabaptist family of faith is called to live according to the values of this Kingdom of God, regardless of what country, language, culture or tribe we come from. As a community of nearly two million Anabaptists in more than 80 countries around the world, we need each other to strengthen and support each other in times of persecution and suffering and in times of joy. Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (Koinonia) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness. Together we share a witness to Kingdom ways of following Jesus here on earth.

This year's regional focus is on the Anabaptist churches in North America. There are nine member churches in North America: Brethren in Christ in both Canada and the United States, Mennonite Brethren in both Canada and the United States, Mennonite Church in both Canada and the United States, Evangelical Mennonite Conference in Canada, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference in Canada, and the Conservative Mennonite Conference in the United States – all together with about 223,000 baptized members. There are about another 300,000 Anabaptists in North America who are not members of MWC. Most of them are Anabaptists who live very separately from the world, such as the Amish, Old Order Mennonites, Old Colony Mennonites, Plain Mennonites, Hutterites, Bruderhof, and more.

Biblical Texts: Matthew 6:9-13, Matthew 6:28-34

Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, makes reference to the Kingdom of God approximately 50 times. Obviously, He made this theme central to His mission on earth. The Sermon on the Mount, which is central to Anabaptist teaching, features the "kingdom" theme prominently. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus prays explicitly for the Kingdom to come upon earth, even as it is in heaven. In the second passage Jesus introduces the priority of the Kingdom over the everyday worrisome cares of life. At a time, when many people experience hardships, it is reassuring to hear the words of Jesus.

Songs

“The Kingdom of God is Ours”, page 19, MWC International Songbook, 1990

“God is Calling Forth a People”, page 1, MWC International Songbook, 2009

“The Lord of the Nations”, page 26, MWC International Songbook, 2009

“Jesus, be the Center”, page 28, MWC International Songbook, 2009

Prayers

Prayer requests for Mennonite World Conference

- To walk more closely in support of persecuted and suffering members
- To grow in fellowship even across the sensitive and controversial theological issues where there are differences among our members
- To reflect Jesus and the Kingdom of God to the world around us.

Prayer Requests from MWC members around the world

- African members request prayer for unity among church groups and leaders
- Asia members request prayer for the ability of Christians and Muslims to co-exist in peace
- European members request prayer for the effects of secularism on society and the church
- Latin American members request prayer for the production of good Anabaptist teaching material for new churches

Prayer Requests from North America, the regional focus for the 2015 World Fellowship Sunday (see attached profile of Anabaptist churches in North America)

- For the MWC Assembly in Pennsylvania in July 2015, and particularly for the availability of visas for foreign guests
- For the growing influences of secularism in our churches
- For the tensions between wealth and the Christian faith
- For the discussions in the churches and conferences regarding sexuality
- For the assimilation of new cultures in our Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches
- For faithfulness in financial stewardship in an age of materialism

Sermon Ideas

1. Definition of the term “the Kingdom of God”
 - a. The Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven) is the rule of God on earth under the kingship of Jesus. The kingdom has come to earth with the coming of Christ, thus being present already now in time but culminating eventually in heaven with God. The benefits of God’s reign are upon God’s people now, but will be fully realized in eternity.
2. Exegesis of Matthew 6:9-13 and Matthew 6: 25-34
 - a. Context
 - i. Jesus mentioned the “kingdom” theme approximately fifty times in the book of Matthew. Obviously, it was a message that he wanted his hearers to hear and understand.
 - ii. The Sermon on the Mount, which includes these two passages of scripture, is Jesus signature teaching lesson. Anabaptists take this sermon very seriously.
 - b. Content
 - i. The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) highlights Jesus’ emphasis on prayer, considered a “spiritual” activity. Our communion with God comes through this activity.
 - ii. The second reference (Matthew 6:25-34) has a much more practical emphasis; living in this world in a spirit of contentment and trust. There are many people in the world, including members in our Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, who

suffer daily challenges. Some suffer for their faith, others do not have enough to eat, still others experience hardship in terms of health or family concerns. In all of these and other difficult circumstances, God promises to provide for us, even though we are worried and afraid.

- iii. Together these two emphases, the spiritual and the practical, make for a balanced Christian life.
 - iv. In praying the Lord's Prayer, we are drawn into God's agenda for this world. With the coming of God's kingdom, God's will, "as it is done in heaven", is introduced and becoming increasingly real on earth. We, who pray this prayer, are agents of God's "heavenly" plan and partners with God in answering this prayer.
 - v. When we are faithful in applying kingdom priorities in our lives, Jesus makes an incredible promise: "all things will be given to you". It is unclear to us how to specifically understand this statement, but the principle of God's goodness and grace surely is part of the promise. Sometimes we may see it clearly evident in our lives; at other times we are reminded that some of God's promises will be fully realized in the life to come.
 - vi. To summarize, when we are kingdom members, seeking to do God's kingdom work, it will be reflected in our lifestyle. Concentrating on kingdom values, "as they are in heaven" and the righteousness of God as it is displayed on earth, the kingdom of God will begin to become a reality here in this world instead of merely a vision of a future heaven.
- c. Outline
- i. Jesus instructs us to pray for the Kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10)
 - ii. The Kingdom involves God's will on earth (Matthew 6:10b)
 - iii. The Kingdom of God is of primary importance in life (Matthew 6:33)
 - iv. God promises to bless faithfulness (Matthew 6:33)

3. Additional Material in Matthew Illustrating the Kingdom of God

- a. Matthew 13: 1-23 The Sower
- b. Matthew 13: 24-30 The Weeds
- c. Matthew 13: 31- 32 The Mustard Seed
- d. Matthew 13: 33 Yeast
- e. Matthew 13: 44 A Treasure
- f. Matthew 13: 45- 46 Pearls

4. Other Resources

- <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/call-christians-be-kingdom-god>
- http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kingdom_of_God

"One Lunch" Offering

MWC invites a special offering to be taken for the global Anabaptist church movement on World Fellowship Sunday. One way to think about this offering is to invite every member to contribute the cost of at least one lunch in their own community in order to support the networks and resources of our global Anabaptist church family.

This gift of "one lunch" per person once a year is something that all MWC members can do. Some people have resources to give much more than this, and should be encouraged to do so. Others with more scarce resources might be encouraged to hear that the Executive Committee of the Mennonite World Conference, with members from every continent, is confident that most adults all around the world can give the equivalent of one lunch per year for the work of the global church.

Here are some ideas on how you might be able to make an offering like this work for your congregation:

1. Plan for a time of shared fasting and praying for the global church during a mealtime before or after worship on World Fellowship Sunday, and include an offering for Mennonite World Conference during that time.
2. Plan for a shared congregational meal together before or after worship on World Fellowship Sunday, with each family bringing food to share. Include an offering for Mennonite World Conference with the meal.
3. Plan for a second offering designated for Mennonite World Conference during the worship service on World Fellowship Sunday.

Funds that are gathered through this special offering in each congregation can be sent directly to Mennonite World Conference using the various mechanisms shown on our website (<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/ways-give>). Or, these funds can be sent to your conference office, clearly marked as designated for Mennonite World Conference, and you can ask that they pass the funds on to MWC.

We are grateful for every congregation that is part of our global Anabaptist family. Together we support each other and learn from each other so that each and every one can be a stronger servant and witness for Jesus Christ.

Symbols

The Kingdom of God frequently emphasizes character traits and virtues that are opposite to traits and practices of the world. The following symbolic acts show different aspects of a new Kingdom:

- A towel and basin illustrates servanthood, humility, and equality
- A peace symbol emphasizes peace and goodwill towards all people, including enemies and those who are in some way different from us
- A simple handshake, or a kiss of friendship, or a bow of respect all convey love, peace and friendship in a world where this is often lacking

Additional Resources

1. See the attached profile of Anabaptist churches in North America.
2. Stories and testimonies from three North American churches are available on the MWC website at: www.mwc-cmm.org/article/world-fellowship-sunday

Please send any photos or descriptions of how you celebrated World Fellowship Sunday in your congregation. Send these to: info@mwc-cmm.org
The stories will be posted on the MWC website.

Worship resources for World Fellowship Sunday in January 2015 were prepared by Iris de Leon-Hartshorn of the United States and Ron Penner of Canada, the two North American members of MWC's Executive Committee.

(Attachment to 2015 World Fellowship Sunday Worship Resources)

Regional Focus: North America

This information about the Anabaptist churches in North America could be printed in church bulletins or shared verbally along with the photos on World Fellowship Sunday on 18 January 2015.

The Anabaptist groups in North America are quite diverse, each striving to faithfully follow Jesus in multi-cultural settings that value secularism, nationalism, and materialism. Worship on Sunday mornings takes place in more than 20 languages in Canada and the United States. Worship styles vary widely, ranging from loud worship bands to the unaccompanied slow singing of the Amish from their 500-year-old hymnbook, and everything in between. The fastest growing Anabaptist groups in North America are the newer immigrant churches and the Amish.

There are about 530,000 adult baptized members in 37 organized Anabaptist conferences in Canada and the United States. Only about one-half belong to groups that are members of Mennonite World Conference. MWC members in North America make up 20% of MWC's membership around the world.

The North American Anabaptist groups that belong to MWC include the Brethren in Christ in Canada and the United States, the Mennonite Brethren in Canada and the United States, the Mennonite Church in Canada and the United States, the Conservative Mennonite Conference in the US, the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Canada, and the Evangelical Mennonite Missionary Church in Canada.

The North American Anabaptist groups that do not belong to MWC are mostly Anabaptists who live very separately from the world, such as the Amish, Old Order Mennonites, Old Colony Mennonites, many plain-dressing Mennonites, Hutterites, Bruderhof, and more.

Mennonite World Conference holds a global Assembly once every six years, and rotates it among the continents, so that everyone might consider attending, and helping to host, an Assembly at least once in their lifetime. This next Assembly will be hosted by the North American Anabaptist churches, and will take place in Pennsylvania in July 2015. Every national church belonging to MWC sends delegates to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference, which meets once every three years. The General Council will meet in July 2015 in conjunction with the next Assembly.

Pray for the North American Anabaptist churches that they might be faithful in following Jesus, and welcoming of all those who will come to the next Assembly, "Pennsylvania 2015."