



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Worship Resources

Prepared by MWC member churches in Canada and the USA for 19 January 2020 or at any time convenient for your congregation.

Theme and texts

a. Theme:

**Jesus Christ:
Our Hope**

b. Why this theme was chosen:

Even in the midst of deep troubles, we come together from around the world to follow Jesus, who gives us hope.

c. Biblical texts:

Lamentations 3:21–26
Psalm 62
Mark 2:1–12
Ephesians 1:15–19

d. Relationship between the theme and the biblical texts:

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday is a Sunday when Anabaptist congregations around the world can

- lament together about the pain and suffering churches are experiencing, knowing from experience that God is faithful;
- bring each other to Jesus for healing and hope, just like the friends of the man who was paralyzed brought him to Jesus;
- pray for each other, just like Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus.

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Prayer Request

a. Prayers from MWC members in Canada and USA

- Canada and the USA are both a gathering of many cultures. For example, there are about 200 languages spoken in the city of Toronto, and 800 languages spoken in New York City. The diversity of these communities can be source of anxiety or celebration. As followers of Jesus Christ the Good News transcends nationality, language, culture and ethnicity. Give thanks that “salvation belongs to our God” (Revelation 7).
- The 10 Mennonite and BIC national member churches in Canada and the USA each have unique challenges as they seek to live out the gospel of Christ in their diverse contexts. Pray for these sisters and brothers as they serve their communities in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray that the shared desire to follow Jesus overcomes the political and social differences within congregations in Canada and the USA.



Felipe Gonzalia

b. Prayers 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 that MWC member churches who are suffering persecution and hardship may have courage and hope to persevere.
- Pray for MWC General Secretary César García, and MWC North American Representative Gerald Hildebrand as they lead and minister to the churches in Canada and the USA, and around the world.



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

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Song Suggestions

Both Canada and the USA are countries full of immigrants from other places, so songs from around the world are used and enjoyed.

From the MWC International Songbook 2015:

- #30 Abre Mis Ojos/Open my Eyes
- #45 Hey Ney Yana/Respect for Creation
- #4 Kwake Yesu Nasimima/My Hope is Built on Nothing Less (I)
- #5 Jesu Alike Ndi Bbwe Lyangu/My Hope is Built on Nothing Less (II)
- #37 Ô Ma Joie et Mon Espérance/In the Lord I'll be Ever Thankful
- #20 Sari Srishti Ke Malik Tumhi Ho/All praise to the God of Creation

Lyrics and music available online:

- I know whom I have believed
- In Christ Alone (My hope is found)
- Jesus, Be the Center
- Jesu, Tawa Pano (Jesus we are here)
- So Lange Jesus Bleibt (The Lord is King)

4

Visual resources

- Many congregations in Canada and the USA use visual images every Sunday to enhance worship: pictures printed on the bulletin, fabric banners hung on walls, symbolic items placed on a table at the front, and picture slides projected on a screen.
- Some suggestions from the texts for images of hope: sunrise, rainbow, sprouting seeds, discarded crutches, treasure chest.
- See Additional Resources for pictures.



Jeffrey Djong

5

Offering

- MWC invites congregations to take a special offering for our global Anabaptist church community on Anabaptist 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 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.

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Additional resources in this package and online

www.mwc-cmm.org/awfs

a. Additional resources in this package

- Suggested liturgies for gathering and for benediction (p. 3)
- Prayers (p. 5)
- Biblical background for sermon content (p. 6)
- Testimonies from Canada and USA (p. 11)
- Cultural ideas from Canada and the USA (p. 16)
- Ideas for Children's Time (p. 17)
- Additional resources (p. 18)

b. Additional resources available online:

- Pictures (including all used in this package)
- Videos
- Posters
- Sample Bulletin Covers

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Lisa Carr-Pries, MWC Executive Committee member from Canada

Bill Braun, MWC Executive Committee member from the USA



Suggested liturgies for gathering and benediction

Gathering:

Call to Worship

Our souls wait in silence;
our hope rests in God
our rock
our salvation
our refuge.
We will not be shaken.
In this time of worship,
we pour out our hearts
because we trust in God's steadfast love.

*Joanna Harader, pastor, Peace Mennonite Church,
Lawrence, Kansas, USA, <https://spaciousfaith.com/>*

Call to Worship

Jesus, we are here.
We are here in this place dedicated to worship and
prayer.
We are here to listen to your voice and experience
your power.

Jesus, we are here.
We are here along with the throng of your disciples
around the world.
We thank you for sisters and brothers assembled
in churches and chapels and homes in cities and
villages across the globe.
With them we gather around your word to hear what
the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Jesus, we are here.
With the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesian
church, we pray that the eyes of our hearts may
be opened in order to know the hope to which
you have called us, to know the riches of our
glorious inheritance as your holy people, and your
incomparably great power for us who believe.

*James Schellenberg, pastor,
Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg,
Manitoba, Canada*

Call to Worship Responsive Litany

**Leader: Our salvation and honour come from
God alone.
He is our refuge, and a Rock of safety.**

People: We wait quietly before God,
for our hope is in him,
our Rock and our Salvation.

**Leader: O my people, trust him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him, for he is our refuge.**

People: We wait quietly before God,
for our hope is in him,
our Rock and our Salvation.

**Leader: From the greatest to the lowliest – all are
nothing in his sight.
If you weigh them on the scales, they are lighter
than a puff of air.**

People: We wait quietly before God,
for our hope is in him,
our Rock and our Salvation.

**Leader: Don't try to get rich by extortion or robbery.
And if your wealth increases, don't make it the
centre of your life.**

People: We wait quietly before God,
for our hope is in him,
our Rock and our Salvation.

**Leader: God has spoken plainly –
we have heard it many times.
Power, O God, belongs to you; unfailing love, O
Lord, is yours.**

People: We wait quietly before God,
for our hope is in him,
our Rock and our Salvation.

*Gerald Hildebrand, MWC Regional Representative,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*



Benediction

Benediction

As we go from this place of worship and reflection and prayer, let us go with these words of blessing which conclude Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (6:23–24):

Peace be to the community of believers around the world, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord, King Jesus, with a love that never dies! AMEN.

*James Schellenberg, pastor,
Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg,
Manitoba, Canada*

Benediction

As we go from here to face the joys and challenges of the coming week, remember our hope is in Christ alone:

The faithful love of God never ceases;
it is inexhaustible!
God's mercy and compassion is
new every morning!
Great is your faithfulness, O God!

So, go into the week ahead with courage
and with joy.
Trust in God and wait patiently for him to act.
For God is good to all who seek him;
and God's loving presence goes with us.

*Gerald Hildebrand, MWC Regional
Representative, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

Benediction

May God open your mind to his presence,
so that you may truly come to know him;

May God open the eyes of your heart
so that you can experience the hope he offers
to all who follow him;
And may you come to understand the full
extent of God's power at work in your life – the
very same power that raised Jesus Christ from
the dead,
and seated him at the right hand of God.

*Christine Longhurst, Assistant Professor of Music
and Worship, Canadian Mennonite University,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada,
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com>*



**Matt Plett ordination at Prairie Rose Evangelical
Mennonite Church, in Manitoba, Canada.
Photo: Daphne Reimer.**



Prayers

Prayer of Confession and Praise

People: Lord God, we confess that we have failed to appreciate the gift of the body of Christ around the world.

Leader: For this reason, ever since we heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, we have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in our prayers.

People: We confess, O God, that as we rely on human wisdom, we have failed to truly know you and your extravagant love for all people.

Leader: We keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know God better.

People: We acknowledge that we have listened to voices of fear and despair and ignored the hope made known through Jesus Christ.



Mennonite Church USA Executive Director Glen Guyton at their convention in Kansas City, 2015.
Photo: Ken Krehbiel.

Leader: We pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we would know the hope to which God has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in God's holy people.

People: We cry out for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may know and collaborate with the power of God. The power of God's mighty strength that raised Christ Jesus from the dead.

People: Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have placed all things under your feet. We praise God for your fullness which fills everything in every way!

Tom Eshleman, pastor, Groffdale Mennonite Church, Leola, Pennsylvania, USA



Members worship at the Conservative Mennonite Conference 2018 annual gathering.
Photo: Jenell Schrock.



Biblical background for sermon content

Lamentations 3:21–26

- The Book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems that serve as lament, an anguished response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, after a long siege by the invading Babylonian army. They are a communal expression of grief and mourning.
- Lamentations gives a focus on destruction, pain and suffering. This serves an important function as part of Scripture, witnessing to a faith determined to express honestly the harsh realities of a violent world and providing readers the language to do the same.
- These verses of hope in chapter 3 express hope even in destruction, pain and suffering.

Psalm 62, a Psalm of David

- David wrote this psalm (song) when some men were threatening David's life, scheming to remove him as king, and even to kill him. This is possibly a reference to Absalom.
- The core of David's message is that in life's most threatening times we can and should trust that God alone is our salvation and refuge.
- Lament plays a role in verses 3 and 4, acknowledging David's pain and despair, expressing honestly the harsh realities of a violent world.
- Through repetition (verses 1, 2, 5, 6) David emphasizes that "only God" or "God alone" is our hope.

Mark 2:1–12

- Mark's gospel is a story about journey and discipleship. Mark invites the reader to journey with Jesus, to become one of the disciples whom Jesus instructs on the way to Jerusalem.
- This text in Mark 2 is the start of a larger unit (Mark 2:1 – 3:6) that contains 5 conflict stories. In each story, Jesus challenges the status quo – the accepted spiritual teaching and social conventions of that day. With wisdom and authority, Jesus responds to confrontation each time, so that the people are impressed. There appears to be a progression of opposition against Jesus in these 5 stories, climaxing in chapter 3:6 with "the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus."
- This story reminds us of what the faith of ordinary people can do. We don't know much about this man or about his friends. Did they live locally or did they travel far to see Jesus?
- This story describes how Jesus recognized the faith of these friends. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*. In Jewish settings, *pistis* is probably best translated not just as "faith," but "faithfulness" as a way of life. The focus of the story is the *pistis* of the man's friends. They know that God intends for all life to flourish, and they take drastic steps to include their friend in that flourishing. They went through chaos, carrying their friend, pushing through the crowds and getting their hands dirty digging through a flat roof probably made from beams and covered with a mixture of earth and straw. Jesus is impressed, as is everyone else in the room by faithfulness acted out in an extraordinary way.



**Iglesia Emmanuel Church in Calgary,
part of Evangelical Mennonite Conference, worships together.
Photo: Iglesia Emmanuel Church.**

- We often need the help of others to recognize Jesus and the hope he provides. Sometimes, we are carried by the faith of our communities. Could this be a picture of MWC? At any point in time, one of us needs the help of the others to “hold the ropes” and “dig through the roof” that we may see the hope and experience the grace we have in Jesus.
- Jesus promptly acknowledges that the man’s “sins are forgiven”. Can you hear the friends say to themselves, “What did he say?” A common understanding in that day would have been that this man had physical problems because of sin in his life or that of his parents. Jesus’ words and actions undermine the common thinking of his day. The man’s relationship with God, through Jesus, is restored, before any signs of physical healing. Jesus, by declaring this man forgiven, announces that the gap between him and God – which others believed was signalled by his physical deformities – has been bridged. The fact that Jesus declares the man forgiven while he remains paralyzed indicates that his relationship with God is not dependent upon his health or illness. By forgiving first, without any healing, Jesus is attacking the common belief that sin caused his paralysis.
- Technically, Jesus does not forgive the man. The grammar is passive – “Your sins are forgiven” – implying that the one doing the forgiving is God. Jesus just announces it. The scribes take exception to this pronouncement of forgiveness, as only God can forgive sins, and they accuse Jesus of blasphemy. The scribes would agree that God can delegate this authority by the provisions of the covenant through its prescribed rituals led by a priest. They did not understand how Jesus could pronounce the man forgiven apart from any of the ceremonies and sacrifices. If Jesus is claiming that right, he is claiming God’s prerogative for himself, and that was blasphemy to the religious leaders.
- To the religious leaders who were scandalized at Jesus claim to forgive sins, Jesus proposes a proof of his authority. He asks, “What is easier to say ... your sins are forgiven, or stand up, pick up your mat and walk?” If Jesus can now heal a man, he demonstrates that his words have effect. The effectiveness of the healing word proves the effectiveness of the forgiving word. Jesus is claiming authority directly from God. The outcome is that the crowds are amazed and glorify God, claiming never to have seen anything like this before.
- What does all this mean to be a global body of Christ? It is an incredible challenge to accomplish this reality. Imagine the diversity that exists even within our local congregations where we have similar cultural backgrounds. To think of unity at a global level feels like an impossible task, especially in a time when even those in the same country can’t get along. How do we accomplish unity in a world where hate seems to rear its ugly head almost every day, and where people treat each other in ways that are inhumane? The reality of a global body is beyond comprehension, just like God’s love – beyond our understanding.



We can declare that we believe the forgiveness, grace and mercy of God is for all people. We can watch the unfolding of the unity of our global church.

- This is the Jesus we confess and worship and serve as a global Anabaptist community of churches. In our shared fellowship through Mennonite World Conference, we encounter many who are longing for the forgiving and healing words of Jesus that have the power to transform individuals and communities. Jesus' authoritative word offers new beginnings to those who experience despair. Jesus' authoritative word brings hope to those who live in hopelessness. Jesus' authoritative word pronounces forgiveness to all people. The forgiving and healing words of Jesus prove effective in our personal lives and in the life of our churches. Together, we give witness to our shared faith in Jesus Christ who is the hope of the world. Thanks be to God!

Ephesians 1:15–19

- Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, and in chapters 1 and 3, Paul lets the Ephesians know the content of his prayers. Paul begins his prayer by thanking God for the faith of the Ephesians and their love for all of God's people. In our global Anabaptist community, we too can praise God for the many spiritual blessings we have in Jesus. We can learn about Anabaptists around the world, and as we retell their stories, we can thank God for their faith and their love for all God's people.
- Paul prays that the Ephesians would get to know God better, and to know the hope to which God has called his people. We too can ask for God's help on behalf of each other, praying that God's Spirit would help us know God better, and especially to know the hope to which God has called us.

- Paul understood all this from personal experience. He had once been a passionate and thoroughly convinced opponent of the way of Jesus. No amount of rational apologetics could have convinced him to follow Jesus until the risen Christ stopped him in his tracks on the road to Damascus. The Spirit of Jesus opened the eyes of Paul's heart through a supernatural revelation. This illumination filled Paul with an indescribable eternal hope that enabled him to endure all manner of human suffering and deprivation for the sake of the gospel. This is a hope that defied any kind of rational human understanding.
- The Ephesian church was a most unlikely place for Christian hope to take root and flourish. Paul likely couldn't help smiling and shaking his head in amazement as he reflected on the incredible miracle God had performed in raising up a thriving church in such a hedonistic city. But Paul realized that without regular experiences of fresh revelation and illumination, Christian hope turns to despair and cynicism. Thus, Paul's continual prayer on behalf of the Ephesians is for fresh revelation of hope and power through Jesus Christ.



**First Mennonite Church Kitchener children's time.
Photo: First Mennonite Church Kitchener.**



- Paul's prayer can give us insight on how to have hope in a difficult situation. Paul wrote this to the believers in Ephesus while he was in Roman prison. Through this prayer, Paul revealed to the Ephesians how they must live when facing the threat of persecution. In order to have hope, their eyes must first be opened so that they have the full confidence that Jesus is their Saviour and Lord. They must not forget that the work of Christ on the cross has transformed them and brought them to freedom.
- On the other hand, Paul describes the non-believers as those having no spiritual eyesight about the saving grace of Jesus. The non-believers have no capacity to experience the power of God that can transform their lives. Paul's prayer shows the importance of having spiritual eyesight that is focused on the saving activities of Jesus, and this spiritual lens will lead us to hope regardless of our present challenges.
- Christian hope shapes the way we see and interact with the world. Menno Simons said it well: "true evangelical faith being of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love".
- Christian hope compels us to share the transforming love of Christ with people all around us. We are moved by the Spirit of Jesus to invite others to know and experience salvation and eternal hope through Christ. But an authentic witness extends beyond a verbal sharing of God's plan of salvation. Christian hope is expressed through actions which testify to a God who loves this world and all who live in it. An action as simple as picking up litter bears witness to Christian hope. Tutoring a struggling reader in a local school testifies to Christian hope. Sponsoring a refugee family proclaims Christian hope.

These are actions that declare that we share Christian beliefs, that we are willing to invest and sacrifice so that the shalom of God may be experienced more fully by those around us. These actions express the culture of our true home in heaven.

- We live in a world that regularly undermines Christian hope. The culture around us tells us to build walls to preserve that to which we feel entitled. It tells us to stay far away from people of different religions because they may harm us. If we aren't careful, our Christian hope can be eroded by attitudes of self-preservation and fear. If we succumb, we lose one of the most powerful expressions of Christian witness: a hope that overcomes fear and suspicion. It is why the Apostle Paul appealed to his brothers and sisters in Ephesus to hold tightly to the life-changing hope that first took hold of them through Jesus. He reminds them that only through the regular transforming encounters with the Holy Spirit can this hope burn brightly in our hearts and lives. It is why Paul shares the cry of his heart for continuous revelation of Christian hope.



Praying for newly baptized youth and adults Evangelical Fellowship Church, Steinbach, Canada. Photo: Brian Davis.



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

- As Christians around the world, let us join in praying with the Apostle Paul for one another. Let us keep on praying that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know him better. Let us pray that the eyes of our hearts would regularly be enlightened so that we may truly know the hope to which God has called us. This hope looks forward to the glorious riches of heaven and lives out of those resources on behalf of all people around us. This hope moves us beyond fear and suspicion, to actions that lead to peace and right-relatedness, in this world that God so loves.

*Don Rempel Boschman, pastor,
Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg,
Manitoba, Canada*

*Greg Yantzi, pastor, Nith Valley Mennonite
Church, New Hamburg, Ontario, Canada*

*Tom Eshleman, pastor, Groffdale Mennonite
Church, Groffdale, Pennsylvania, USA*

*Sunoko Lin, pastor, Maranatha Christian
Fellowship, Northridge, California, USA*

*Gerald Hildebrand, MWC Regional
Representative, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

*Arli Klassen, MWC Regional Representatives
Coordinator, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada*



**First Mennonite Church in Kitchener waving greetings to brothers and sisters in Mennonite World Conference.
Photo: Felipe Gonzalia.**



Groffdale Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, USA, worship with visual symbols. Photo: Groffdale Mennonite Church.



Visuals for worship at the Mennonite Church USA Women Doing Theology Conference in 2014. Photo: MC USA staff.



Testimonies from Canada and USA

Encouragement from MWC President

“Remember, sisters and brothers, that salvation and reconciliation through the cross and resurrection are the greatest hope for us and for a broken world. Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”

— Nelson Kraybill, MWC President, Elkhart, USA



A painting entitled “Happier Days,” depicting the West Nickel Mines Amish School. It was provided to MCC by the artist Elsie Beiler.

Nickel Mines: From Tragedy to New Hope

No one could have guessed the dark thoughts lurking in a neighbour on 2 October 2006, as he approached the West Nickel Mines Amish School near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA. The guns and barricades left five Amish girls dead. Five more sustained severe injuries.

News media quickly amassed, drawn by the sharp juxtaposition of intentional violence amidst Amish tranquility. A shocked world watched a peace-loving community plunge into grief.

Within days, a second story enveloped the community. The Amish reached out with a message of forgiveness to those close to the deceased neighbour who had killed their children.

Decades of Amish preaching, lodged primarily in the stories of Jesus, generated a crisis response patterned after such stories. If Jesus offered the prayer, “Vergib uns unsere Schuld, wie wir vergeben unsern Schuldigern” (Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors) then those striving to follow Jesus could do the same.

This compelling story of tragedy and forgiveness captured the imagination of three Mennonite academics. They described and analyzed these events in *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*.

The Amish honoured the authors’ request to give the author royalties to a nonprofit organization by designating those earning to the children’s ministries of Mennonite Central Committee.

Brisk sales in English, German, French, Korean and Japanese yielded nearly \$200,000 USD. This generosity enabled hundreds of children in many countries to attend school.

Five little girls never returned to the West Nickel Mines Amish School. The Amish destroyed that school building, but built a new school nearby with a new name, New Hope School.

Thanks to the Amish parents’ tenacious grip on faith, children in Africa, Asia and Central and South America found their way to school and new hope.

— Kenneth Sensenig, Mennonite Central Committee, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA



Saanich Community Church English class.
Photo: Saanich Community Church.

Whether it is crafting blankets and quilts for Mennonite Central Committee, or serving as the start/finish location for the Ride for Refuge that from 2014-2018 raised \$500,000 for people who are displaced, vulnerable and exploited, we follow Jesus through the Spirit, engaging God’s mission in the world.

— *Ken Peters, pastor, Saanich Community Church, Saanich, British Columbia, Canada*

**Creating Space for People to Meet Jesus in
Downtown Winnipeg**

I sat with Gary on the corner of Portage and Donald in Winnipeg. Someone told me they’d seen him panhandling there, so I went to join him. Gary is a friend of mine and part of my church community in downtown Winnipeg. It was a different sort of pastoral visit. He was quite drunk when I found him, but he was glad to see me. Gary is a Christian and struggles with alcoholism. “This isn’t me,” he said. “I am more than what you see here.” I assured him that I knew that. “It’s just this alcohol. I don’t know why I do it.”

This story doesn’t end with Gary’s addiction disappearing. But he knows that his hope for a different life is found in Jesus. His hope is found in belonging and becoming part of something bigger than his addiction.



One88 Community Church lunch. Photo: One88 Community Church.

Our Church Serving with Hope

Saanich Community Church is a small Anabaptist-evangelical Mennonite Brethren community just north of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. We strive to be the type of neighbours Jesus speaks about in Luke 10 who serve one another and the larger community with joy because we believe our existence is a lived response to God’s goodness. Our relationship with Jesus Christ compels us to be good and do good unto others (Titus).

We are honoured to participate in God’s redemption of one Middle Eastern man (name and picture withheld for security reasons) who has suffered incarceration and torture for his political beliefs. Nearly executed but miraculously delivered, he still lives with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). Today, because of his confession in Jesus, he has been disavowed by his family of origin. The church provides him part-time employment and walks compassionately with him toward his wholeness. He participates in our community-wide free English language classes. He was helpful when the congregation resettled a different refugee family from the same region.



Within the church community, Gary finds that he matters. He is not just a recipient of charity, but a member of the body. He has something to contribute and, rather than be consumed by his addiction, he finds purpose in Christ.

But it's a slow, patient journey. And so, I journey together with him and he with me. We learn from each other and, when life is not so good, we even end up visiting each other on street corners.

— *Dave Ens, pastor, One88 Community Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

Praying through the decades



Erla Buehler

A Sunday school assignment in the 1940s to exchange letters with a missionary began a Canadian woman's lifelong investment in prayer for India.

A Sunday school teacher at Elmira Mennonite Church assigned

teenaged Erla Buehler to write to Lena Graber, a registered nurse from Iowa, USA, who was serving with what is now called Mennonite Mission Network at Dhamtari Christian Hospital in India.

"Thus began my interest in India," Erla Buehler writes in a letter to MWC.

"That spark continued to grow into a flame," Buehler writes. At Ontario Mennonite Bible School in the 1950s, it grew as she learned about William Carey and the missionary movement.

Her dream to visit India came true in 1997 when her niece's Indian-born husband led a tour to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Kolkata.

Listening to speakers on the theme "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" was "inspiring, uplifting, wonderful."

"Assembly Scattered in addition to Gathered was also eye-opening," Erla Buehler writes. The group visited the Mennonite Central Committee centre and an orphanage project.

"We were also privileged to be billeted in private homes," she writes. "It still amazes me how the Holy Spirit was active in putting this all together."

When she returned home, Erla Buehler tracked down Lena Graber and resumed correspondence. She praised God to learn of Lena Graber's work starting nursing schools in India and Nepal where she was one of the first Mennonite Board of Missions workers.

Today, Erla Buehler learns of the church's work through the MWC Prayer Network email. By special request, she receives it every two months mailed to her in hard copy.

"All these years and still there is a marvellous network of faithful praying believers building the kingdom of God." This 88-year-old continues to be part of it.

— *Karla Braun, MWC writer, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

Christian-Muslim Relations

One of the ways I have personally experienced Christian hope is participation with my friend Andres Prins and EMM's Christian-Muslim Relations Team. This team's vision is to facilitate relationship and engagement between Christians and Muslims in ways that promote dialogue and mutual respect while also clearly expressing Christian witness.



Andres Prins and Muslim Friend. Photo courtesy of Andres Prins.

Our visit to the mosque in Lancaster represented one of these efforts. We spent time listening to the imam share about Islam and engaging in a time of questions and open dialogue about the differences between Christian and Muslim beliefs. We experienced the warmth of growing friendships and hospitality amid obvious differences in our religious beliefs.

The Muslim imam spoke confidently to our group of local pastors as he declared to us that Islam is a rational religion that can be defended with logic and reason. “To we Muslims, Christianity defies logic, reasoning and rational thinking. It makes no sense to us.” Without the Spirit of God opening our eyes to the unfathomable truth of the gospel, no amount of human persuasion will convince us. This is why Paul prays for the church at Ephesus that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would open the eyes of their hearts so that they would know the hope to which he has called them.

These kind of unlikely relationships become a testimony to Christian hope. The statement we intended to express in our visit to the mosque was that the reconciliation we have experienced through Jesus Christ moves us to pursue relationships of shalom (peace) with all of our neighbours, whether or not they share our beliefs.

We pray that our Muslim friends will experience a miraculous revelation of hope through Jesus Christ.

Regardless, our investment in these friendships represents a testimony of the culture of heaven, a witness of the eternal hope we have in Christ.

— *Tom Eshleman, pastor, Groffdale Mennonite Church, Groffdale, Pennsylvania, USA*

Lordship in life

“Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it,” (1 Peter 3:15, NLT).

The June protests in Hong Kong against the proposed extradition law brought much attention in the media. Something unique about this protest is how the church has stepped up her role as peacemakers.

On 12 June 2019, during a potential violent clash between protesters and the police force in Hong Kong, Christians came out in droves to declare peace. Sandwiched between the two groups, our brothers and sisters sang the chorus “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord” to defuse the tension. They also condemned the unnecessary force police used toward the largely peaceful tactics of the protestors.



Mennonite Brethren members Lawrence Cheung and Antony Law participate in a rally in solidarity with Hong Kong. Photo: Vancouver Christians for Love, Peace and Justice.



Responding to the church’s call to be a conduit for social justice, 16 June 2019, more than 500 brothers and sisters gathered in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, to worship and pray together outside the Chinese consulate to show our support and solidarity with the peaceful protesters in Hong Kong.

Discipleship is about declaration of Jesus’ lordship in our life. Redemption is personal, but also carries a public dimension. Theologian Leslie Newbiggin reminds us that our faith is a public faith.

Christ is our ultimate source of hope. The church’s role is to witness through the hermeneutic of the gospel through acts of social justice.

Jesus commands us to be “in the world, but not of the world” (John 17:13–19), so our witnessing is grounded, relevant and contextual to the society of which we are part.

When the church speaks up against injustice, we declare peace. By singing “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord,” we declare that the peace of Christ triumphs over any fear, oppression and injustice.

— *Lawrence Cheung, spiritual care practitioner and member of Killarney Park MB Church, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*



**Fireweed. Photo: Tim Engleman,
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Fireweed

This poem of hope was written originally for Easter Sunday 2019. It signifies hope in Jesus as reflected in Creation.

Up from the ash,
where once fire raged
leaving scorched black earth,
rise magenta-topped stems,
lithe and delicate,
bowing in the wind
then standing tall again, laughing
in the face of death.

Fireweed saviour,
you pave the way,
flourishing on disturbed earth,
bringing life again where once
death reigned.
A miracle of grace
riding on silky-haired seeds
carried by the wind
to landscapes in need of
salvation.

Resurrection Christ,
you germinate seeds of
new life in the burned and
barren places in our world,
and in the brokenness of our lives,
growing beauty, hope, and love
on delicate stems rising
up from the ash.

*Fireweed is one of the first plants to re-establish on land that has been burned by fire or otherwise cleared of other vegetation. It is native throughout temperate North America. It was common where I grew up on the Canadian Prairies and Rocky Mountains.

— *Wendy Janzen, pastor, St Jacobs Mennonite Church, St Jacobs, Ontario, Canada*



Cultural ideas from Canada and USA

- For spaces where it is possible, congregations sometimes arrange the seating in the worship space in small circles or around tables to interact with others in the congregation during the service. Some local churches also serve breakfast or snacks and eat together as part of the worship service.
- Congregations in North America worship in many different languages. Some congregations begin by sharing greetings from one person to another in different languages: *Welcome! ¡Bienvenidos! Bienvenue! Willkommen! स्वागत है (svāgat haiñ)! Selamat datang! Siyalemukela!*
- “Table fellowship” is a common experience in most congregations. Some congregations eat together weekly after worship, some monthly on a Sunday or a weeknight, and others just for special events. Every family brings enough food to share for a few more people than within their family. All pots of food are placed on central tables with plates at one end, so the meal is a “potluck”: you get whatever is available. Seniors and children are often encouraged to go past the food tables first.
- Some congregations use the space outside of the building where they gather to create a community garden. They work together with people from the neighbourhood to care for the garden and then share the produce with those in need.
- Many congregations look for ways to use their building during the week to connect with people in their neighbourhood. Some offer language classes for new immigrants. Others let daycares use their space or let community groups use it for a meeting space.



**First Mennonite Church Kitchener shares a potluck meal.
Photo: First Mennonite Church Kitchener.**

Some open up their space to be an emergency overnight shelter for those living on the streets during the winter. These different ways allow congregations to share the love of Jesus to more people in their communities.

- Quilting continues to be an important gathering time in many congregations, although not everyone sews. Historically comprised of women, many groups have met weekly since World War I to sew comforters and quilts, baby kits, and other material resources for distribution within their congregation, local community and globally through Mennonite Central Committee.
- Breakfast meetings continue to be an important gathering time for small groups in many congregations. Historically mainly for men, these groups sometimes meet monthly for breakfast, hosting a guest speaker.



Ideas for Children's Time

Story from Mark 2:1–12

For children, verses 1–5, 10b–12 of this Gospel passage are most important. It is a wonderful story about good friends who are convinced that Jesus can help their friend who is sick. It is a story about how Jesus surprises us by meeting our deepest needs. That is enough content for a good encounter with Jesus in the children's time. The text lends itself well to imagining it, to showing it with simple drawings, or acting out with small figures and a simple structure representing a house.

- Help children become inwardly quiet so they are ready to hear a wonderful story about Jesus and four very good friends. Then, open the Bible to Mark 12 and read verses 1–2. Pause and wonder with the children:
What would it have felt like to be part of that crowd? Why would so many want to hear what Jesus had to say?
- Read verse 3 and pause. Wonder:
Who were the four people who were bringing a paralyzed man? Why are they bringing him to Jesus? How will they get their friend through the crowd? (let children imagine silently, or aloud, and do not correct them with your own ideas)
- Read the first sentence of verse 4 and pause. Read it again. Explain that a thatched roof can be opened and repaired without too much trouble, but that some dirt probably fell on the heads of the people under them so that they probably backed away from there. Read the rest of the verse. Wonder:
How was the man who was paralyzed feeling? How did his friends feel? What did the crowd think? What might Jesus have been thinking?

- Read verse 5. Wonder:
Is this why the friends brought the man who was paralyzed to Jesus? Do you think they are surprised? I wonder why Jesus began by forgiving the man for his sins?
- Read verses 10b–12. Ask:
Are you amazed? (I am. And I am thankful that Jesus knew everything the man who was paralyzed needed to be well.)
- Ask for and accept silent or spoken responses to the following questions:
What was your favourite part of the story? What do you think was the most important part of the story? Where would you find yourself in this story?
- Close with a short prayer that thanks God for good friends, and for Jesus, who knows what we need and is willing to help and forgive.

Elsie Rempel, former Director of Christian Education and Nurture, Mennonite Church Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

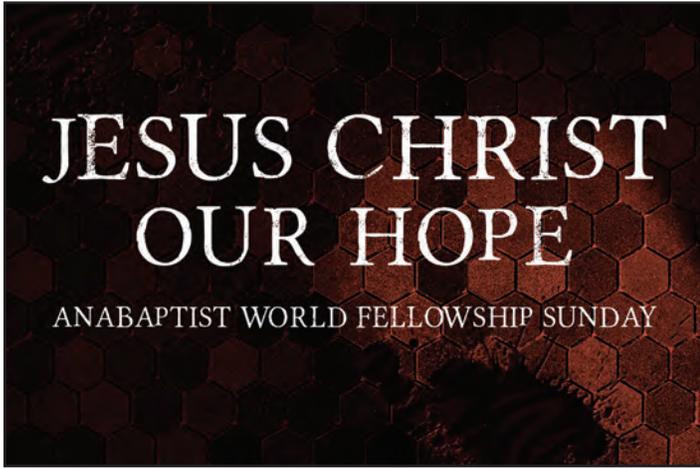


Children singing at Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, 2015. Photo: Ken Krehbiel.



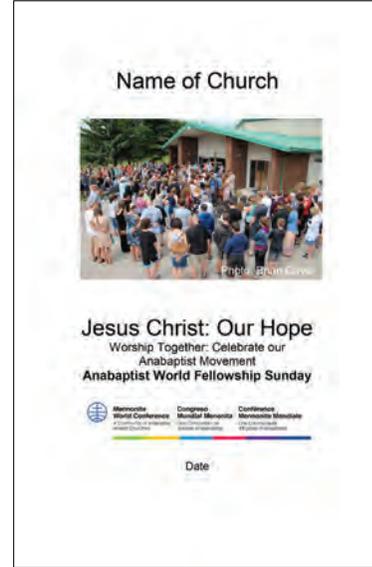
Additional resources

Poster A



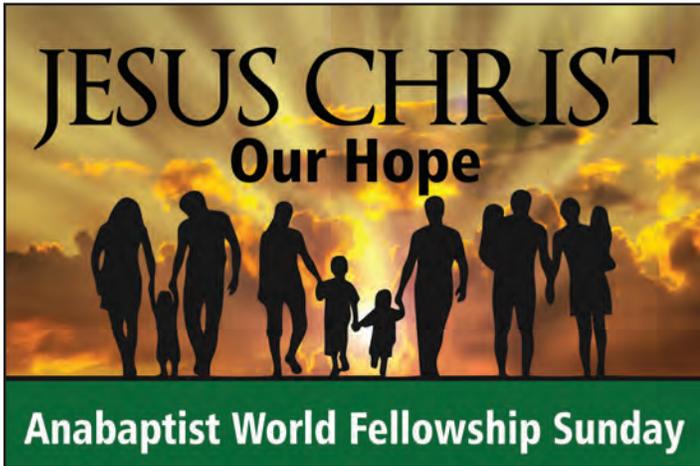
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Poster: Scott McDonald, Douglas Mennonite Church

Sample Bulletin Covers

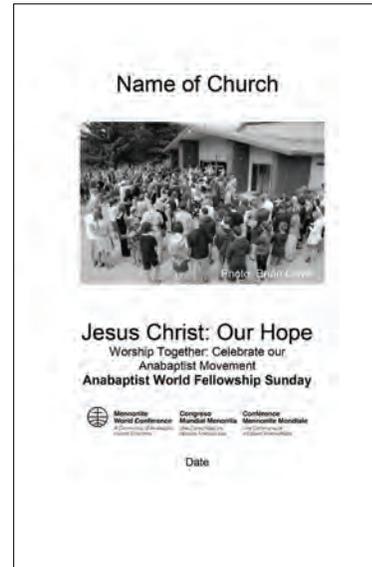


Sample bulletin cover: colour version.
Click on the image above to download the .doc file.

Poster B



Click on image to download file.
Poster: Scott McDonald, Douglas Mennonite Church



Sample bulletin cover: black & white version.
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