



Peace Sunday 2017 Worship Resources

Prepared by the
MWC Peace
Commission for
24 September 2017

Theme and texts

a. Theme:
**A renewed
peace church
builds bridges**



**b. Why this theme
was chosen:**

In a world divided by difference, it is not easy to be a peace church dedicated to the ways of Christ's peace. As we mark 500 years since the birth of the Reformation, Mennonite World Conference recommits ourselves and our congregations to the work of peace by building bridges. Indeed, our desire for Christ's peace requires us to embrace those who are different.

**c. Biblical
text:**

Ephesians 2:11-22

**d. How the biblical
text explores
bridge building:**

In Ephesians, a chiasm is employed in this carefully constructed letter. The letter depicts God's grace in and through Christ. The chiasm's frame draws attention to Christ's reconciling and restoring activity "through his blood" and to his being an evangelist of peace. What holds the two parts together is the phrase "the near and the far."

2

Prayer Requests:

- As the Syrian conflict, now six years running, continues to cause turmoil for Syrian citizens, militarized groups and neighbouring countries, pray for wisdom and guidance for both individual actors and governments to break the cycle of violence and create a lasting and holistic peace.
- Praise the Lord that as part of the peace process in Colombia the FARC-EP (guerilla group) have completed the disarmament process and are now only a political group, not an armed group. As the FARC-EP members continue to re-engage society, pray that communities would work together to heal the wounds of the past.
- Praise the Lord for churches who live out an example of peace, breaking the cycles of violence with their witness to the ways of Christ's peace. May our churches have the awareness to counter injustice against those who are marginalized. Pray that the church would continue to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in its capacity to demonstrate interdependence and love as alternatives to violence.



Danang Kristiawan

- Many areas around the world are experiencing violent conflict or simmering tensions: rebel soldiers in DR Congo; persecutors of Christians in India and Nepal, Nigeria, Northern Africa, and other countries; government corruption and interstate tension in South Korea. Pray that our brothers and sisters walk in courage and hope rooted in Jesus as they witness to peace amid opposition to their call to follow Christ.



Peace Sunday

3

Song Suggestions

From the MWC International Songbook:

- #24 La Paz de la Tierra
- #51 Love God, Love Each Other
- #22 May the Peace of Christ be with you
- #8 Senzeni Na?
- #7 Som'Landela

4

Sermon Illustration

Once strangers and without God (2:11, 12)

Christ has brought the far near through his blood (2:13)

CHRIST IS OUR PEACE
(2:14-16)

Christ proclaimed peace to the far and the near (2:17, 19)

No longer strangers and a home for God (2:19-22)

BIC Church Cuttack, India



Dan Dyck

5

Symbolic worship activities or visual resources

- Distribute building blocks as people enter; during the service, invite people to come forward to construct a bridge together.
 - The beginning and the end of the "bridge" could already be started.
 - Arrange for someone to oversee the building of the bridge.
- Post drawings of two different people on opposite sides of a wall. Distribute construction paper for congregants to write down tools for holistic peace. Invite people to create a road or bridge between the two figures.
- Ask volunteers to construct the chiasm (chart or ladder diagram) out of its component parts.
- Invite members of the larger community to join a fellowship meal after the service.
- Invite a leader of another religious community to have an open conversation during the service or Sunday school, creating an opportunity to explore building a relationship with the guest or his/her community.

6

Additional resources

www.mwc-cmm.org/peacesunday

a. Additional resources in this package

- Gathering/ Benediction (p. 3)
- Prayers (p. 4)
- Sermon Notes (p. 5)
- Charts (p. 10)
- Stories and Reflections (p. 12)

b. Additional resources available online:

- Pictures (including all used in this package)

Contact Information:

Andrew Suderman
MWC Peace Commission Secretary
AndrewSuderman@mwc-cmm.org



Suggested liturgies for gathering and benediction

Gathering/Call to Worship

Praise the One who hears the cry of the poor,
who lifts up the weak and gives them
strength.

Praise the One who feeds the hungry
and satisfies the longing of those in need.

Praise the One who holds with tenderness the
orphan and widow
and gives the stranger a land and a
home.

(from Hymnal: A Worship Book, #683)



Celebrating World Fellowship Sunday 2017 at Crossroads MB Church, Winnipeg, Canada. Photo: Tony Schellenberg.

Benediction

A Franciscan Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort
at easy answers, half truths, and
superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your
heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation
of people,
so that you may work for God's justice,
God's freedom, and God's peace.

May God bless you with tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain,
rejection, starvation, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand to
comfort them and to turn their pain
into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference
in this world,
so that you can do what others claim
cannot be done.

And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy
Spirit –
be upon you, those you love and those for
whom you pray
this day and for evermore...

Amen.



Prayers

God of peace

God of peace,

Coming into this place of worship from a world that is sometimes confusing and threatening, we pray for your presence here and now among us.

We thank you for this community of faith, where we listen to the words inspired by your message of love, where we share our lives with brothers and sisters, where we learn about compassion, where we live in hope, where we can be together in peace.

God, all around us we see growing division between people because of politics, gender, religion, race, economics. in so many countries, we see growing nationalism and populism. Aggression and violence are becoming part of our daily lives on social media and in the streets.



A bridge traversing a ravine that can fill up with snow melt or heavy rains, on the Rock Glacier Trail in Kluane National Park and Reserve, Yukon, Canada. Photo: Dan Dyck.

We pray for this world, God.

That leaders may grow in wisdom, that people treat each other with respect. May we understand that the way to your kingdom is paved with peace, justice and love for the earth and the people. Be with us, grant us your grace.

Amen.

Father the one and only God

Father, the one and only God of the universe. It is good to be in your presence in this time of gathering with your people.

We are challenged again with your call to peace among all people. The challenge to be agents of reconciliation is ours and we accept it as we go from this place.

Reconciliation begins with us as a people. Allow us to keep a short list of grievances as we walk with one another in our homes, in our communities, in our gatherings. May your peace make us quick to forgive. May the love of Jesus rule in our lives.

Reconciliation also reaches out to those we meet on the road no matter where it takes us. Allow us to be agents of your reconciliation and peace wherever we go, day by day. Our hurting world is so in need of peace. Give us courage to be agents of your peace.

Work in us now, Holy Spirit, with power and presence to help us accomplish all you have asked of us as we go from this place. We walk by faith in your strength.

We pray in the name of our Saviour and Lord, our Prince of Peace, Jesus. Amen.



Sermon Notes

For Christ is Our Peace: Ephesians 2:11–22

–Thomas Yoder Neufeld

I love museums and galleries. A lot goes into organizing a gallery, like proper lighting, choosing which paintings get set next to each other, how to direct the attention of the viewer.

The writers of the Bible frequently did the same thing in a literary fashion. They used a device called “chiasm.” It comes from the Greek letter “chi” (“X”). Chiasm is a kind of framing device intended to draw the reader’s or hearer’s attention to the centre around which the rest of the passage is arranged. It is wonderfully suited to contemplation and memorization in a culture in which texts were less read than performed, less viewed than heard. We find it in both Old and New Testaments.

In Ephesians, this device is employed in this carefully constructed letter. The letter is divided into two roughly equal halves (chapters 1–3 and 4–6), like two galleries in a great museum. The first depicts God’s grace in and through Christ, the second what a fitting response looks like for those who have experienced that grace. In

other words, one half of the diptych is what God has been and is up to, the other what we as the beneficiaries are to be up to.

In this brief reflection, we will concentrate on the centre of the first half of Ephesians, 2:11–22 (see charts #1 and #2).

Outer frame – “strangers no more”

In a chiasm one should look for corresponding elements. I’ll call the first set (vv. 11–12, vv. 19–20) the “outer frame.” This frame draws a sharp contrast before and after.

- a. The first section (vv. 11–12) begins with a reminder to Gentiles of who they once were: “uncircumcision,” outsiders to the covenants, “atheists,” and thus without hope. This is very much a picture of how “we Jews” view “you Gentiles” whom “we” have considered to be beyond the circle of God’s care.
- b. Compare now the corresponding part of this “outer frame” (vv. 19–22): You are no longer strangers, but members of the family, part of the commonwealth, now not rejected, but chosen by God. Rather than being “without God, godless,” you now constitute a home for God.

Inner frame – “the far brought near”

The inner frame draws attention to Christ’s reconciling and restoring activity “through his blood” in the upper half of the inner frame (v. 13), and to his being an evangelist of peace in the lower half (vv. 17–18). What holds the two parts together in this case is not a stark contrast as previously, but the phrase “the near and the far.”

Taking an up-close look at the artistry (sort of like sticking our nose right up against a painting to



Inter-Mennonite worship service for World Fellowship Sunday 2015 in Kinshasha, DR Congo. Photo: Charlie Malembe.



observe the brush strokes), we notice that two texts from Isaiah play a role in the creation of this inner frame. The first is taken from Yahweh's messenger in Isaiah 57:19,: "*Peace, peace, [shalom, shalom] to the far and the near, says the LORD.*" Jesus is here depicted as that herald of peace. He is wearing the shoes of readiness to announce the good news, the gospel of peace (6:15). We now hear the echo of Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news (lit. 'evangelizes'), who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

This inner frame is itself more than a frame; it is an example of astonishing creativity. Jesus not only speaks peace (v. 17), but makes peace by offering his own life. "Blood" (v. 13) certainly refers to Jesus' death on the cross, as will become clear in the next verses. But "blood" is also a symbol of life – the liquid of life – and thus also of Jesus giving life to those who drink of it (John 6:53–57). "Blood" thus becomes also a way of speaking of Christ as the giver of life.

Who are these "near and far" in vv. 13 and 17? In Isaiah 57, the "far" are obviously the exiles in Babylon, "us away from home," we might say. In Isaiah, God is calling his people home from exile.

Here in Ephesians, the "far" are the Gentiles mentioned in vv. 11–12. The author uses Isaiah 57 to recast Gentiles as no longer the "other," but family members in exile whom God is bringing home. Notice that in vs. 18 the evangelist and maker of peace takes both the far and near together into the presence of their common divine parent.

This way of using Scripture is breathtakingly creative art. If there is "artistic license," it is driven by the desire to capture the scope of God's peacemaking in and through Christ.

The centre – "for he is our peace"

And now we come to the very centre of the chiasm and thus to the heart of the first half of Ephesians, with the singular focus on Christ as "our peace."

Imagine you are looking at vv. 14–16 as a painting. What do you see? You will likely notice first images of destruction and violence:

- a shattered wall (now demolished), once erected to separate the chosen from the rejected,
- a torn fence intended to keep what is holy, holy,
- a cross, still in that day the supreme symbol of state terrorism, a sign of terrifying, sadistic state terror found here in all its horror at the centre of this painting,
- an act – actually, two acts – of murder: the murder of the Messiah by crucifixion, and the Messiah's own act of murder. Precisely at the moment of his own death at the hands of his enemies, he commits the murder of enmity (or hostility) itself!

Christ's embrace of humanity in his death must never be separated from the embracing he did with his life, his teaching, his proclamation of the gospel of peace. He was both a practitioner



Roseau River, Manitoba, Canada. Photo: Karla Braun.



**Celebrating World Fellowship Sunday 2017 at Hamilton Mennonite Church (Ontario, Canada).
Photo courtesy: Hamilton Mennonite Church.**

and an evangelist of peace (v. 17). The cross was in that sense a consequence of his breaking down the walls of division, of his stepping out to the highways and byways with his invitation to the banquet of God, of his confronting a world of injustice, impoverishment, marginalization and disease with the promise and threat of the kingdom of God.

But the tenacity of God’s loving embrace of humanity is seen in the fact that the spurning of that loving initiative – the murder of the peacemaker – became itself the final assault on fear and hostility. Jesus’ ultimate act of self-disarming turns out to be a lethal attack on the hostility and estrangement that keeps us in the grip of fear and terror of each other and of God.

But look again. In the midst of this carnage, right in the middle of this violence, you will see images of peace, birth, transformation:

- the reconciling of enemies, of “you” and “us;”
- the reconciling of both of us together to God;
- and the creation in Christ of a new “us,” of the “new human.” In Christ, or through Jesus, God is starting all over again with humanity, and doing so not by the elimination of godless enemies, but by the costly process

of forging bonds of unity and peace for those who were once prisoners of enmity, whose hostilities were forged over centuries, not least on the anvil of piety.

It’s all here! Atonement, new creation, reconciliation with God, reconciliation among enemies: the whole gospel from beginning to end, distilled in one remarkably intense picture. No wonder it forms the centrepiece in this gallery.

Singing in the home of God

Let me switch now from imagining a painting, to what is actually in vv. 14–16, namely, a hymn or poem. Originally, the hymn may have celebrated the overcoming of divisions in very general terms. In its present form, it invites readers to sing this song in direct relation to a very specific division, that between *Jews and Gentiles*.

When Ephesians was written, the division between Jews and Gentiles went so deep that our text refers to it simply as “the enmity” or “the hostility.” Jesus is confessed as “our peace” because through his ministry, death, and resurrection (2:4–10), the division between



**Celebrating World Fellowship Sunday 2015, Mennonite congregations Groningen-Drenthe, the Netherlands.
Photo: Jacob H Kikkert**



accepted/rejected, loved/unloved, insiders/outsiders has been crushed, demolished, “murdered.” More, “in him” a new humanity is being born out of erstwhile enemies. “You” and “we,” the far and the near, Jews and Gentiles, old enemies, have access to “our” divine parent – not by ourselves, not with those just like us, but together with those we remember as the “other.” Peace, indeed!

In vv. 19–22 “you” and “we” together become one family, indeed, one temple, God’s home. Notice that God’s home is made of stones not only from the covenant community quarry (the “we” in this passage), but more dramatically from the landfill site of rejected stones (the “you” in this passage). God’s home is a massive recycling project, we might say. This temple – the reconciled and re-created people of God – is a powerful witness to God’s grace. In its very existence, this temple is a subversive presence of retrieved and rescued “living stones” in a culture of fear and suspicion; a profound and sociologically visible witness to the radical hospitality of the One who is “our Peace.” God loves to live in a home of rescued building materials, in a home permanently under construction.



In 2015, GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa – Javanese Mennonite evangelical church) pastors and Nahdlatul Ulama (an Islamic organization) held a meeting in the GITJ Jepara church. Photo courtesy of Danang Kristiawan.

Implications for us today

Let me suggest some ways this text is relevant to us in our time and place.

First, this euphoric hymn places peace at the very centre of our confession of Jesus. That resonates loudly with contemporary Anabaptist emphasis. But, some may wonder whether we are not reducing Jesus to one of our favourite Mennonite Anabaptist themes.

Whatever discomfort we have, this text makes it unavoidably clear that peace is located at the very core of a faithful confession of Jesus. Peace is essential to the confession of all who name the name of Christ. It is *not* an Anabaptist distinctive, and we must not allow it to become our ticket to the roundtable of the wider church. Should other traditions within that wider body of Christ not accord it centrality, that’s not a vindication of our uniqueness and specialness, but an invitation for us to pick a good argument with our sisters and brothers in the wider church.

That said, we should not be smug. Anabaptist Christians face two dangers. One is to see “Christ is our peace” chiefly in relation to God, failing to see how Jesus, in living and giving his life, intends to make peace within a divided and hostile human family. The other danger is to reduce peace to a political or social goal, too often loosening it from its holistic tether in the confession of Christ. Too often, we only connect peace with Jesus as a model of nonviolence. That is not the answer Jesus is looking for when he asks: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29).

This passage thus challenges us to the highest possible Christology with the most comprehensive understanding of peace that exposes both a Christ-less peace and a peace-less Christ as falling far short of the confession Jesus is wishing to hear from us.



An 'interreligious live in program', at an interfaith meeting, young church leaders, including many GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa – Javanese Mennonite evangelical church) pastors, stayed at an Islamic boarding school with young Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu church leaders for two days. Photo courtesy of Danang Kristiawan.

that peace is intended to reach to those who are different, strangers, enemies?

This is no easy song to sing, no easy confession to make. Because to confess this Christ is to invite the enemy in, to chase down the stranger with love (Romans 12:13), to chain ourselves to the stranger far away and the all-too-familiar one near at hand (4:3). It will change us, as it did the early community of faith as it moved out of Palestine into the Gentile regions of the Roman empire. But that is what "salvation by grace" looks like (2:5, 8).

The church is and has always been a risky enterprise, most especially when it has been faithful. Risk is at the very core of peace. We rehearse the risk God took in Christ every Good Friday. In its very visible existence, in its brokenness and unfaithfulness, the church testifies to the degree to which Christ took a real risk in breaking down the protective wall. But precisely in its vulnerability it can be a forceful witness to the wondrous grace of the One who is "our Peace."



A narrow gauge railway bridge built around 1900, close to Carcross, Yukon, Canada. Photo: Dan Dyck.

To confess Christ as "our" peace is a confession we do not make by ourselves. Jesus is most faithfully confessed alongside those we would just as soon keep at arm's length, who threaten or disturb our "comfort zone," whether we think of ourselves as individuals or as congregations. To be "born again" is never a solitary experience. We are born *together* into the "new human" together with our enemies. So be careful! The chain of peace, with which we are tied to each other and to Christ (4:3), more often than not chafes.

Just as you never know *with* whom you will confess that Christ is "our" peace, so you never know *before* whom you make the confession. What does it mean for us to confess Christ as our peace and the peace of the other in a world in which Christians do not control the levers of power? What does it mean to confess that in the face of indifference and even ridicule? What does it mean to confess that before those who have their own faith? In other words, what does it mean to say Christ is "our" peace, knowing



Charts

Chart #1

Chiastic Structure of Ephesians 1-3

A	Eulogy – in praise of God	1:3–14			
	B	Thanksgiving and prayer for church	1:15–23		
		C	Salvation for both Jews and Gentiles	2:1–10	
			D	CHRIST IS OUR PEACE	2:11–22
			C1	Salvation for both Jews and Gentiles	3:1–13
			B1	Prayer for church resumed	3:14–19
A1	Doxology – in praise of God	3:20–21			

Chart #2a

Ephesians 2:11-22

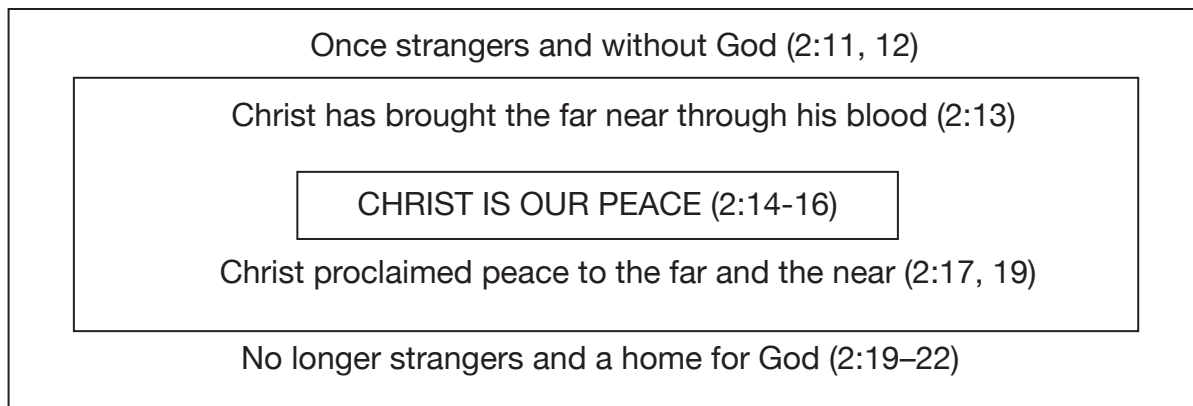




Chart #2b

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NRSV)

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” –a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands – 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.
15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.



Stories and Reflections

Reconciliation in Colombia: Building bridges in a divided society

–Andrés Pacheco Lozano (Colombia)

Exploring what it means to be a “Renewed peace church that builds bridges” –inspired by Ephesians 2:11–22 – could not have arrived at a more *kairos* moment for Colombia. The signing of the peace accords between the government and the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia –Ejército del Pueblo, a Colombia guerilla group) and the subsequent implementation are official actions to finish the armed confrontation that has been going on for more than 50 years. This limited and imperfect attempt to end the open war has reopened hopes and expectations of nonviolent solutions to armed conflicts and the possibility of creating paths of peace and reconciliation. However, the process has faced skepticism, criticism, polarization and opposing views reflected in the public referendum where the “no” vote won over “yes” to endorse the process*.

How do we see our role as a renewed peace church and the body of Christ in this context? How do we understand reconciliation and its theological foundations so that it inspires and guides our decisions and actions? These are urgent questions in Colombia’s *kairos* moment.

Reconciliation is at the very centre of Christian belief. It is the essence of our faith (Ephesians 2:14–16).

In Christ, we are reconciled with God and with one another (v.13, vv. 19–20). These verses remind us that reconciliation is God’s gift: we are first and foremost reconciled creatures in Christ, and so are the others.

At the same time, reconciliation is a *ministry* (2 Corinthians 5:18). We participate in God’s

restoring plan for the world by building bridges to others, to those with whom we were hostile or who have been hostile to us. Even though we cannot grant reconciliation on our own, we are called to witness to that gift and to participate in God’s activity in our actions with others.

But, how could we understand that there is still violence and injustice, exclusion and poverty in the world? We have to remember that God’s work inaugurated in Christ is yet to be completed in the ultimate promise of the New Creation. The New Creation and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God are not just promises for the restoration of individuals, but most importantly for the reconciliation of relations: God with creation, God and humanity, humans with humans, humanity with creation. The reconciling of relations not just a positive outcome of our faith, but a way of anticipating the complete restoration and reconciliation of relationships and witnessing to God’s ultimate promise.

What difference does it make for me as a Colombian if we understand the other and ourselves primarily as reconciled creatures with God? What if the “other” is a FARC soldier?



Participants at the Gempaz national retreat, 2016, in Villa de Leiva, Colombia. Gempaz (Grupo Ecu mico de Mujeres constructoras de Paz) is an ecumenical group of women peacbuilders. Photo: gempaz.org.



What about the victims? Can we still, as a peace church, build bridges toward all of them? Does the ultimate promise of the complete restoration of relationships inspire our actions today?

The evil in the world must not be taken lightly, as if. The damage of more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia is great. We have to take serious care of the ones who have suffered, both inside our congregations and outside of them, building bridges to the “wounded” others.

Reconciliation and restoration of relations are not cheap processes. In Colombia, this will mean years – even decades – of healing wounds and correcting and transforming the causes of pain. At the same time, we are called to build bridges toward the ones who have harmed us. This process of building bridges is costly, but it is also our call to overcome as the body of Christ present in the here and now.

Some of these bridges are already built. Mennonite congregations and organizations in Colombia are accompanying victims of the armed conflict and other forms of violence. They have documented the wounds of violence; supported, encouraged and advocated for

dialogue instead of “armed” and “violent” methods to conflict; and are engaging in monitoring the implementations of the peace accords. In some cases, they have started dialogues with former perpetrators and members of the FARC group. Even though they may be small examples, they are bridges that signal God’s gift of reconciliation, that the promise of the full restoration is becoming a reality in the here and now.

What walls or barriers do you see in your context? What is God’s call for you as a community in that midst?

**The public referendum took place 2 October 2016. “No” to the approval of the “Peace Accords” won over “yes” at 51% to 49%, showing the deep polarization and division on the matter. This, in addition to 62% voter abstention, makes it hard to have a real estimation of the general reception of the accords. A second version of the accords that resulted after discussion with some sectors of the opposition and by making some adjustment to the former version was signed 24 November 2016 and later ratified by the congress as “representation of the population” without a second referendum process.*

Being a peace church in today’s United States of America

–Jason Boone (United States)

These are turbulent times in the United States. Our nation is divided about almost every important issue. Politics, religion, culture – fields that function best when they encourage unity and cooperation – are the battlegrounds where opposing factions clash.

While these battles play out, we have other, very real problems to contend with. Lack of economic opportunity, rampant drug addiction in our communities, unjust laws that target racial and ethnic communities are just a few. The ceaseless antagonism saps our collective energy and imagination. Instead of working together to



Members from Mennonite agencies, Justapaz and Mencoldes, join in an ecumenical prayer for peace in Bogotá, Colombia, led by DiPaz (Diálogo Intereclesial por la Paz, Inter-ecclesial Dialogue for Peace). Photo: Anna Vogt.



Celebrating World Fellowship Sunday 2017 at Crossroads MB Church, Winnipeg, Canada. Photo: Tony Schellenberg.

address complex problems, we look for others to blame.

Politicians, political parties, other nations, immigrants and refugees are all targets of blame at times. It doesn't matter who we blame, whether it's justified or not. The point of the exercise is to shift the responsibility off ourselves and onto another.

The vulnerable among us suffer the most when blame is translated into policy. With no voice in the halls of power, people who are poor, immigrants or prisoners are the easiest to make into scapegoats for our problems.

In this context, a peace church has much to do! We must follow Jesus' example and stand with the outcast and the marginalized. We must speak with them in the halls of power. We must work with them to transform systems, laws and policies of oppression. This is the perhaps the most urgent task at this time.

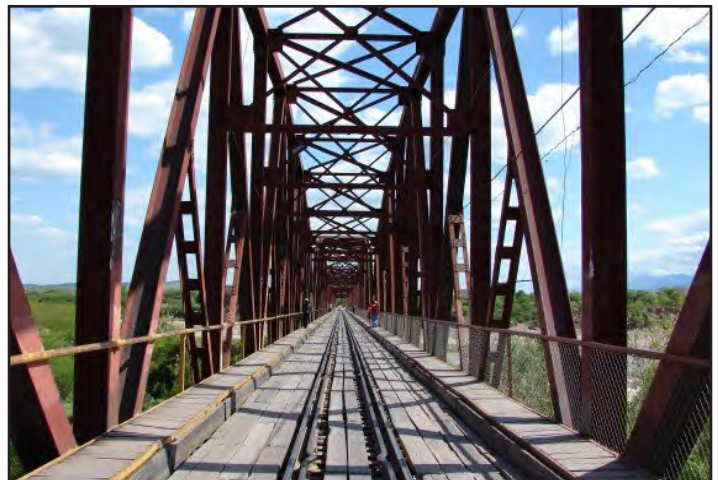
And yet there's another dimension to this work that can't be forgotten. The division and enmity that fuels our need to blame won't cease just because laws are changed. The divisions in our

civic, cultural and religious activities first appear in our everyday life and gradually deepen.

An unfortunate belief has taken hold in our country. It says that change is fueled by outrage, hostility and contempt for those who disagree with us. Jesus gives us different advice. Jesus commends us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5). That isn't a prescription for weakness or apathy. This is insight into the kingdom of God and an invitation to participate in radical change.

How do the words and example of Jesus play out not only in the halls of power, but in our families, with our neighbours and co-workers? Do we see those we differ with as enemies to be overcome? Or do we see within them the most important identity we all share: child of God? Do we live insulated bubbles, where our opinions and prejudices are supported and justified? Or do we seek out those who live differently, think differently, so we can better understand their position?

A peace church is called to work on both of these levels at once. We must boldly seek justice in the public square while building bridges of reconciliation with our neighbours, even those who hold different positions.



**Santa Cruz, Bolivia.
Photo: Elma Schroeder.**



Building bridges between prisoners and the community in Zambia

–Kajungu Mturi (Zambia)

As we consider Ephesians 2:11–22, I reflect on how the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia has been working to build bridges between prisoners and the community.

In Ephesians, the Gentiles were viewed as outsiders and excluded from the community. Today, in many places prisoners are excluded and portrayed as “evil,” “wrongdoers,” “criminals,” “bad people.” When prisoners finish their sentences, communities do not often accept them back into the community. This, in turn, raises the levels of recidivism.

The Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia (BICC-Zambia) has been working hard with the support of others, such as Mennonite Central Committee, to build a bridge between the prison and the community. The church initiated Peace Clubs in prisons to help prisoners deal with conflict among themselves and with prison officers. Prisoners and prison officers were trained together, which was rare for these two groups to learn together. The program helped



Robert Mudaala, the Peace Committee chairperson from the Brethren in Christ Church Zambia Conference, facilitating the head men and women from Sikalongo District on the Victim Offender Reconciliation program. Photo: Kajungu Mturi.

to re-humanize prisoners who are typically dehumanized by the system and the community. The church and community members eat and play soccer with inmates. Community members would visit them and provide some material support such as food and soap. All of this in response to Jesus’ reminder that when “I was in prison... you came to Me” (Matthew 25:36).

This work did not end in the prison. Peace Clubs created the environment of reintegration for prisoners back into the community. The work to empower prisoners continued upon their release. Some Peace Club members started Peace Clubs in their home community as they were released from prison. Thus, rather than running away from ex-prisoners, the community was able to come closer and learn about peacebuilding.

Although the BICC in Zambia has been working to develop bridges between prisoners and the community, the overarching criminal justice system continues to be dehumanizing. While the church works hard to build bridges, the system builds walls. Our hope is that one day the government will join the church in building bridges between the prisons, prisoners and the community.



MWC visitors, Tesfatsion Dallellew (Ethiopia) and Thuma Hamukang’andu (Zambia) smile as they receive the gift of a goat from the Kayunga Mennonite Church, of Uganda Mennonite Church on a visit in 2016. Photo: Okoth Simon Onyango.



Piecing together community

–Jennifer Otto (Germany)

During Europe’s last great refugee crisis in the aftermath of World War II, Mennonites sent quilted comforters, food and other supplies to German families beginning the long, hard process of rebuilding after war. Today, Europe is experiencing a new refugee crisis, as hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan seek security and a sense of belonging in countries like Germany. Differences in language, culture and religion can all too easily become barriers to integrating into a new community, leading to fear and resentment from citizens of the host country, and isolation and hopelessness for newcomers.

At the *Friedenshaus* (“Peace House”) in the industrial city of Ludwigshafen, we strive to build community and learn peace, incarnating a space where Germans and longer-term immigrants can get to know their new neighbours.

One concrete way we live our mission statement is through our quilting group. Every Monday evening, a group of 12–20 quilters (mostly women) gather to cut fabric, sew squares and knot comforters to be donated through



A finished quilt made by the quilting group at Friedenshaus.
Photo: Jennifer Otto.

Mennonite Central Committee to refugee camps in the Middle East.

We come from diverse backgrounds, including members of the local Mennonite congregation born in Germany and Canada; recent refugees from countries like Syria, Egypt, and Palestine; and longer-term immigrants from Iran and Iraq. We are Christian, Muslim, Baha’i and agnostic. We range in age from middle-schoolers to octogenarians, and everything in between. We speak German, English, various Arabic dialects, and Farsi. And we are all novice quilters. We make mistakes and must figure out how to fix them.

Together, we are learning how to make blankets that will be sources of warmth and hope for others. But we’re also learning how to communicate through barriers, support each other and be comfortable around one another, forming relationships that will help to foster a culture of peace, mutual respect and openness in our neighbourhood and in our city.

The spirituality of a stranger

–Danang Kristiawan (Indonesia)

A renewed peace church calls for renewed commitment to one another; even those who may be our enemies. Building bridges resolves disconnectedness. Without relationship and connectedness, peace cannot flourish. This is essential if we want to relate with those who are of a different faith or culture.

A significant challenge in multi-faith and cross-cultural relationships is perceptions based on assumptions. This causes us not to value the other as a child of God.

Hospitality plays a key role in building understanding across religious and cultural views. Churches have a responsibility to create spaces where authentic engagement can occur.



However, churches must also embody the spirituality of a stranger, a guest, assuming a position of vulnerability. This provides the disposition to reach out. Instead of waiting to host, the church initiates new forms of relationships with others.

The Javanese Mennonite Church in Jepara does this is by visiting our Muslim neighbours. Mennonites in Jepara comprise about 1% of the total population, which is largely Muslim. There is no animosity between the different religions in Jepara, but even though our church building is only 300 meters away from an Islamic organization's building, there has not been much of a relationship established among Christians and Muslims!

When our church decided to take seriously our call to be a peace church, we prioritized building relationships with those of other religions in our city. Our first step was to visit one of the young Islamic leaders and share our dream to build relationships between Mennonites and Muslims in Jepara. Together, we arranged an art and culture performance in which our communities, not just our leaders, could participate and get to know each other. We also initiated meetings to reduce wrong perceptions of the other.



Danang brought his family to visit an Islamic boarding school during Idul Fitri. His family visited with friends and the children learned about tolerance. Photo courtesy of Danang Kristiawan.

This required a long process. It was difficult to look beyond our preconceived notions of the other. After seven years, we have a good relationship with our Muslim neighbours. We celebrate the International Day of Peace together; the church participates in their anniversary celebrations; they participate in our Christmas celebrations.

Assuming the posture of a visitor requires humility. We approach others without having a full picture of who they are. This requires respect, trust and belief that we have something to learn. Being a stranger requires one to need the other. It means that we come not in arrogance and power, but with openness and sincerity, vulnerable and capable of being rejected.

Such an approach does, however, bring hope. As a guest, we invite prayer and blessing from the other – even our enemy. Jesus demonstrates this posture through his incarnation. He empties himself and becomes a servant, showing humility. He embraces suffering, demonstrating his vulnerability (Philippians 2:6–8). His posture provides the means for God's peace to be realized (Ephesians 2:14), which gives us courage.



An Ulama (Muslim learned one) and a Catholic priest join in the Christmas celebration at GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa – Javanese Mennonite evangelical church) Jepara and are spontaneously involved in drama performance. Photo courtesy of Danang Kristiawan.

