

# We are People of God's Peace

Christian Citizenship Sunday 2002 worship materials

## A calendar note

Your congregation can choose to use these materials whenever they best suit. Mennonite Church USA has two dates you might use.

### July 7 is Christian Citizenship Sunday this year.

Our congregations are invited on this day to emphasize that the church is the primary community, not the nation-state. Loyalty to God often brings the church in conflict with the values, practices, and loyalty expected of citizens of the state. On Christian Citizenship Sunday we reflect on the claims that nationalism tries to pin onto us and we often gladly accept. We also wonder about what our relationship is and should be to the State. What policies do we support? What policies do we take for granted? What policies do we ignore because they do not affect us?

### November 11 is now Peace Sunday.

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## Introduction:

### The Confessions of a Mennonite Gen Xer

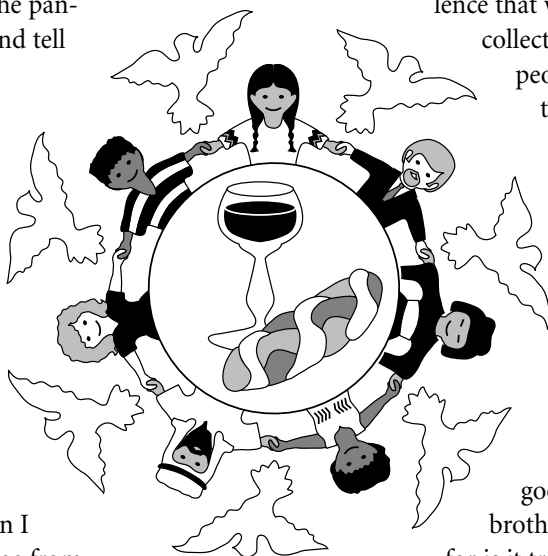
**L**iving in New York City makes me think harder than ever about my pacifism and my faith. I'm confronted daily by tough questions that only theoretically crossed my mind when I lived in my suburban hometown in the Midwest. Am I going to lie to the pan-handler again and tell him I have no change? Am I going to pick up the pieces of garbage that fly around my feet when the wind stirs? Why am I so fascinated by the young Jewish men and women I see walking home from synagogue on Saturdays? What makes me (despite my brown skin) feel out of place walking down West 125th—the main artery of Harlem—to the City Parks & Recreation Center? What ought a Christian to do in the face of poverty and economic hardship, pollution, religious pluralism, and racial prejudice?

The events of last September did not make me reconsider the practicality of peacemaking. Those events made me reconsider *why* I think peacemaking is such a critical part of my Christian faith. What has my Mennonite

preoccupation with peacemaking, plus a healthy dose of justice in the mix, got to do with the Christian church's responsibility to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to those who do not know God's salvation? Simply put, it has everything to do with what the Christian church is and ought to be about. Our world needs a message of good news that offers real solutions and real peace of mind and heart in light of the problems and violence that wound our collective soul. As

people committed to teaching and preaching God's peace, we *can* bring the good news of God's transforming power to our world.

We have a goodly heritage, brothers and sisters, for is it truly a blessing to look out at the world and believe that God's will is reconciliation among enemies and that strangers become friends. Even though we do not always share the *exact* same views about peacemaking or the same sense of justice, we are still bound to one another through our love of God and our desire to worship. Let our worship be a celebration of our common vision of God's reign when this world and all that is in it are made new and give glory to God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost!



## Purpose & Sermon Preparation Ideas

**Theme:** *We are People of God's Peace*

**Bible Texts:** *Isaiah 2:2-4; Romans 5:10-11*

**T**he theme for these resources comes from a hymn written by Menno Simons, who believed that Christian faith is about regeneration—being made new in a radical way. The regenerated do not go to war, he taught, because through newness of life, they have turned from those ways. The connection between salvation and peacemaking in Menno's thought is simple and clear.

Centuries later, with the ebb and flow of all kinds of expressions of Christian faith, what we believe about salvation, peace, justice, killing, war, the use of force, and turning the other cheek remains as complicated as ever, especially because often the words we use make it easy to categorize each other in ways that reduce our convictions to caricatures. My hope is that these worship materials will help you and your congregation find a voice to proclaim, "We are people of God's peace," in a way that has integrity and authenticity for your context.

These Bible texts provide us with vision (Isaiah) and hope (Romans) for our lives as peacemakers living in God's

*shalom*. The biblical principle of peace, *shalom*, is different than our English word "peace" or the current use of *shalom* in modern Hebrew. Biblical peace expresses God's concern for physical and material well-being; it requires having a sense of justice that looks at things like God does; and it is an attitude of honesty, integrity, and an absence of hypocrisy and lies. There is much in common between our understanding of this holistic peace and how we understand Jesus' commandment that we love our enemies.

**We are** people of God's peace as a new creation. Love unites and strengthens us at this celebration. Sons and daughters of the Lord, serving one another, a new covenant of peace binds us all together.

**We are** children of God's peace in this new creation, spreading joy and happiness, through God's great salvation. Hope we bring in spirit meek, in our daily living. Peace with everyone we seek, good for evil giving.

**We are** servants of God's peace, of the new creation. Choosing peace, we faithfully serve with heart's devotion. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, confidence will give us. Christ the Lord is our defense; Christ will never leave us.

—Menno Simons, 1552

"We are people of God's peace," trans. Esther Bergen in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), #407.

But we also need to look at the bigger picture. How does our understanding of peace change us? Where do we find it in our worship? How does it fit with our understanding of salvation and God's intention for our lives?

We only need to go to Jesus' read-

ing from Isaiah when he returned to Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff) and the Lord's Prayer to see that Jesus instructs us to understand God's salvation as the gift of peace. So God's gift of salvation is shown through:

- ◆ God's concern for our total welfare through provision of daily bread and healing for broken hearts,
- ◆ God's justice through the arrival of God's reign in our lives and in our world, and
- ◆ God's desire for honesty and integrity through deliverance from and forgiveness of our wrong-doing.

Notice that these points all have horizontal and vertical dimensions. We ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Daily bread is both the nourishment we need to sustain our physical bodies, and also our source of spiritual "leavening." We understand forgiveness of sins and indebtedness to be something we receive from God and from one another. The "already/not yet" nature of God's reign is the tension that demands creativity on the part of all Christians as we accept God's gift of salvation.

We simply cannot live rigidly inside or outside of God's reign because we live in both. The earth is the Lord's and everything that is in it, the psalmist declares, and that is why holistic peace is so important. We cannot appreciate the fullness of God's hope for the world

## What does it mean to preach peace?

Does it mean talking theologically about a particular social issue? Is it reflecting on a spiritual sense of peace? Try this idea on for size: Maybe it means preaching about the nature of God's salvation for all of humanity. These books will help you focus your thoughts:

***Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace*** by Perry B. Yoder (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1987). This is an excellent introduction to how Christians can think about "peace" in a big-picture way. The challenges of Yoder's reflections are especially important in our current North American context.

### ***Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism***

by Leo Driedger & Donald B. Kraybill (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania; Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1994). Another important book to have in your congregational library, ***Mennonite Peacemaking*** gives us a historical picture of Mennonite peace theology and then a clearer understanding of how that theology has changed during the last several decades. The authors also describe the challenges they see lying ahead for our congregations as we think theologically about how our faith commitments include peacemaking.

unless we appreciate the fullness of God's good news brought into our lives by Jesus Christ.

These questions and our Anabaptist response to them are at the heart of our bold claim that "We are people of God's peace!" We practice and preach a gospel of reconciliation because that is how we understand who Jesus is to us every day. Part of what that means is that we are committed to loving each other even in the midst of great conflict and we refuse to walk away unless we can bless each other as we go. We live with the challenge of reconciliation every day. But because we also live with the blessing of God's love and mercy we might feel as though we have failed, yet we can have hope that our attempts at being faithful have brought a smile to God's face.

As you prepare for Christian Citizenship Sunday (or Peace Sunday) this year, take time to do some "theological lounging." Sit down with several people from your congregation in a cozy coffee shop, get comfortable, and ask each other some unabashedly theological questions. Find out how people in your congregation talk about and show what their Christian faith means to them. How is peacemaking part of their faith and what God's gift of salvation means to them? How do they express those things in your congregation?

## Communion

Consider including communion in this worship service. Why? Because the bread and the cup are also symbols of daily bread. When we share these symbols we lift up the community of believers but we also take part in the act of table fellowship which is one of the many ways Jesus brought healing to the people he met during his travels (think of Zaccheus). The roads of our personal journeys with Jesus necessarily intersect with others. The kind of nourishment we find from the resulting fellowship is worth considering.

With the Isaiah passage firmly in the

## "Understanding our faith: The Bible teaches peace"

Ted Grimsrud, assistant professor of theology and peace studies at Eastern Mennonite University, developed a series of eight bulletin inserts for Mennonite congregations. They are available for download on the web site [www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org).

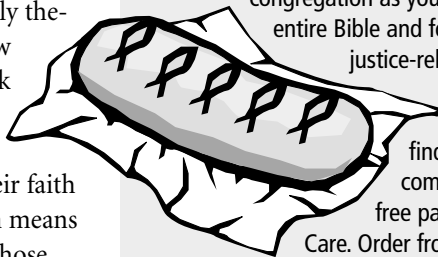
- 1 "The peace vision of the Old Testament"
- 2 "Ancient Israel's power politics"
- 3 "Prophetic faith"
- 4 "Jesus and the peaceable kingdom"
- 5 "Enemy love"
- 6 "Paul: The transformation of a violent man"
- 7 "Hope for the Lamb's triumph"
- 8 "Pacifism is a faith conviction"



- ◆ Consider inviting small groups and Sunday school classes (middle school to adult) to use these teaching/discussion tools.
- ◆ Create a monthly bulletin board display in a prominent place in your church building where people can contribute their own reflections on each theme in writing or through visual art. Invite specific Sunday school classes, various households, small groups, committees, etc., to create each month's display.
- ◆ Invite a number of area congregations that aren't necessarily Mennonite to join together and sponsor an evening Bible study series based on Ted's reflections.

## "Bread for the Enemy: A Peace & Justice Lectionary"

Compiled and edited by Dorothy Jean Weaver, professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, this lectionary is another resource that you can introduce to your congregation as you prepare for this worship service. Weaver combed the entire Bible and found 364 passages that deal with themes peace- and justice-related, ranging from reconciliation to the prophetic word to hospitality. Individuals and groups that want to do Bible study as part of their journey as peacemakers will find this book indispensable. The book was printed on a combination of 100% post-consumer waste and 100% tree-free papers as part of our increasing commitment to Creation Care. Order from the web site [www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org).



background, we can add the following three texts to Romans 5:10-11. Weaving together the three-fold understanding of biblical peace, the Lord's Prayer, and these other texts results in a surprising celebration. Let's take a closer look.

- ◆ Psalm 23:5a
- ◆ Proverbs 25:21-22
- ◆ Matthew 26:26-30
- ◆ Romans 5:10-11

If we explore a literal reading of the snippet from Psalm 23 we can easily find ourselves in a very interesting place. Imagine walking into a familiar room after an extremely stressful day. You smell something good. You close your eyes and breathe in deeply, the wonderful aroma

filling your senses. As you exhale and open your eyes, a table appears before you. You approach and see that it's set elaborately. Walking around the table you notice all the wonderful food, candles, real linen napkins, crystal, china, silverware.... Curiously, the table is set for many but you are the only person around. Who could have prepared this? Who is it for? A gentle voice urges you to take your place at the table. As soon as you've seated yourself and look up, surprise covers your face. All the seats are filled. Your dinner companions are your enemies, or at least people who make you feel terribly uncomfortable, scared, or just plain angry.

Finding ourselves seated at God's table with Jesus as our host might easily involve a scenario like this one. How will we respond when we find ourselves seated next to someone we're shocked was even invited to the feast? When we add the image of the "Great Supper" (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24) to our practice of communion as a time of remembrance, we open ourselves to a different way of thinking about church and community, neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies.

The reconciliation Paul reminds the Romans of is essential to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean that there won't be days when we don't get along. It means that every time we are invited to the table, God is offering us salvation from broken lives and hearts. The new life waiting for us wants to be lived, but first we must accept the call to be made new. John Paul Lederach's book *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999) provides a new and stimulating approach to reading Matthew 18:15-22 and explores the significance of table fellowship as part of reconciliation.

Think about using your communion celebration as the basis for some dramatic moments in worship. Here are some ideas to ponder.

## Drama

Drama is a powerful teaching tool because it brings emotions into worship that words cannot.

Drama can set the stage for connecting communion with our beliefs and feelings about peacemaking.

Set a lavish table in the front of your worship space. Cover it with a tablecloth so those seated cannot see under the table.

The drama begins as someone dressed in business attire, carrying a briefcase and an armload of papers and files, enters. The person walks toward the table talking on a phone about how horrible the day has been.

All of a sudden they see this magnificent table. Wondering aloud where this all came from and who it is all for the person begins to look around and out the windows for signs of someone who may know what is going on.

As their back is turned, several people emerge from under the table and/or from the front rows of the congregation and are seated at the table by the time the speaker turns around. The people seated at the table need to look like they would be "enemies" of the speaker. They could be people off the street, teenagers against the establishment, people who dress quite the opposite from the businessperson, etc.

Then a voice comes over the sound system asking the businessperson to be seated because "I have prepared a table for you in the presence of your enemies." The person sits down and looks around the table rather bewildered. The group begins to dig in and then freezes for two to three seconds, the drama ends, and they all exit.

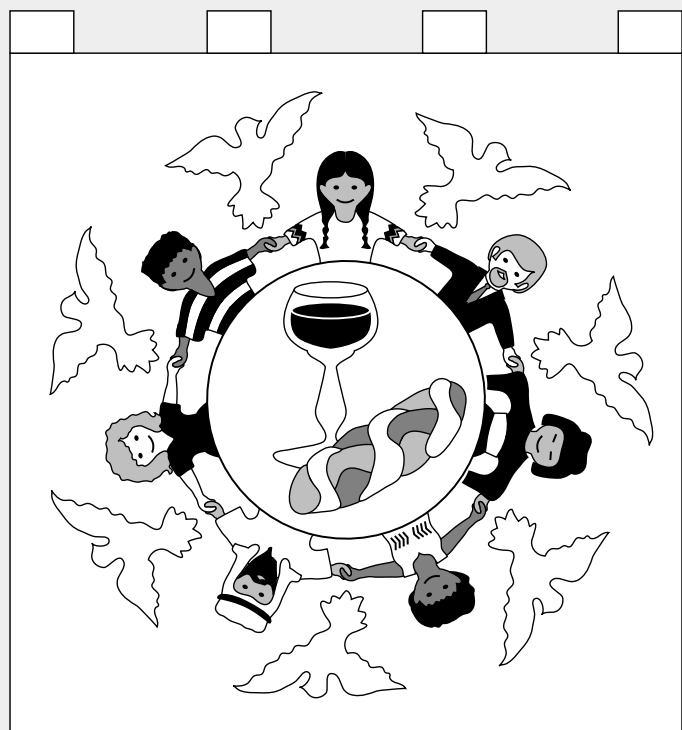
## Options

- ◆ The main character does not have to be a businessperson who has had a tough day at the office. It could be someone who is obviously a U.S. citizen and the "guests" could represent our nation's "enemies" either by wearing appro-

## Banner idea

**C**hrist and Christ's gift to us are at the center of our peace with God and with each other. I have depicted that with the bread and the cup placed in the center of the banner. All are welcome to accept God's gift and come to the table to fellowship with God and each other and to celebrate. As we join hands with our brothers and sisters around God's table and around the world we can more easily work toward peace. I chose to use skin-tone colors in the braided loaf of bread to remind us that the body of Christ is made up of people of all colors and backgrounds. —*cf*

The web site [www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteChurchUSA.org) has the banner in color, and also Mary Beth Lind's recipe for *Reconciliation Bread*, a braided loaf of three colors. If you use a three-toned loaf for communion, you might also use crackers of three colors for the children.



priate ethnic/national attire or by having the flag and name of these “evil axis nations” on their clothes.

- ◆ The main character can play her- or himself. The “enemies” could be media personalities, politicians, or other ideological characters that represent a “threat” to how people in your congregation understand peacemaking.

## Visual Environment

“We held our communion feast one Sunday in January. Our goal was to create warmth and celebration as a church family, so making the table accessible to all ages was important.

We re-arranged our worship space and set up two eight-foot tables end to end, covered them with festive cloths, and accented them with lit candles.

We had plates of sweet breads (banana, pumpkin, etc.) and crackers, sliced apples and oranges, bowls of cheese cubes, grape clusters, red raspberries, and blackberries. One of our members baked several loaves of traditional bread. In addition to two pitchers of grape juice we included a pitcher of water recalling Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman. There were cups so people could pour juice or water for one another and several common cups for those who preferred to dip their bread.

A bowl of Hershey’s hugs symbolized our congregation’s commitment to racial reconciliation in light of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. (The white and brown swirls of chocolate represent different peoples coming together to make something sweet.)

We sang a number of communion songs and hymns that added to the sense of celebration and gave people the opportunity to take their time as they feasted. As people came to the table, members of our elder team greeted them and invited them to help themselves. A note in the bulletin encouraged parents to help young children select foods appropriate for them (grapes and

crackers instead of the cup and bread). People came to the table from wherever they were, regardless of age or spiritual development, yet we were all part of the celebration of God’s people.

Many people commented that it was one of the most significant communion experiences they had had for a long time.”

—from *Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Indiana*

## Children’s Time

1. Show the children the banner. (On the web site [www.MennoniteUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org) you’ll find a page you may color if your congregation doesn’t make the banner.) Ask them what they see. What things are the same about the people? Different? What might they be doing in this picture? What are the things in the middle of the table? What might the people be going to do with them? Why might the bread have three colors?

After talking with the children about your congregation’s practice of communion and their participation in it, talk about sitting at a table with enemies. (You might first define enemy on a young child’s level: someone who makes your life hard, or makes you very angry or sad.) How would it feel to have a meal with an enemy? Why does God invite us to have meals, and communion, with our enemies? Make connections between the peace that God gives us, that Jesus’ disciples make, and that comes from eating at the table with enemies, drawing attention to the banner to make the images concrete.

You may choose to end by giving each child a copy of the banner (from the web site) to color. Be sure to have diverse skin-tone crayons available.

2. Give each child a small stack of “Communion Invitations” that they may color and decorate during



the sermon.

(Available on the web site.)

- When they have finished making their invitations more beautiful, they should give them to adults sitting near them.
3. Have the children exit the worship area and go to the kitchen. With the help of supervising youth or adults, they will prepare the communion feast and carry the elements back into the worship area to neatly arrange on the table.
  4. Simple stickers with four stick figures and the words “All God’s Children Love Peace” are available for sale on the web site [www.MennoniteUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org). Children can either color stickers before worship and give one to each person, or pass out colored pencils (work better than crayons) and stickers as people enter. Be sure to color with multiple skin tones.

## Worship Words

On the next page, you’ll find several worship pieces you may copy and use in your congregation. You may find a reading of the peace section of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* on the web site.

As you prepare the litany “We Are People of God’s Peace” you can choose ALL to be either the five readers together, or the entire congregation. To add time for thought, after the ALL say “We” you may incorporate a brief pause—maybe some candles are lit, a banner is raised, a verse of the hymn is played only by instruments. Then all resound again with “We are people of God’s peace!”