



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

Peace and Justice
Support Network

Peace Sunday

Ephesians 2:11-22

*For He Himself is our
peace, who made
both groups into one
and broke down the
barrier...*

— Ephesians 2:14

Along with Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Church USA celebrates Peace Sunday the Sunday closest to the International Day of Prayer for Peace, which is Sept. 21.

However, you may use these materials any Sunday that works for your congregation.

DESTROY the WALL BARRIER, the dividing wall of hostility

Peace Sunday 2011

Walls and divisions exist to serve three main purposes: To keep out or in, to protect, to divide. There are times when such barriers are useful and necessary. Without walls and a shepherd, sheep would be easy prey for hungry wolves. Without carefully maintained fencing, cattle can escape their bounds and strain neighbor relations. Without retaining walls and harbor jetties, erosion would quickly wash away significant amounts of earth, and watercraft would be without safe haven from large waves and ocean swells.

But when walls divide people, they avoid the hard work of bridging disputes through building and sustaining relationships, and instead increase hostility, distrust and fear. The Berlin Wall was built to limit an exodus, but ultimately proved to be a porous symbol of a failed state. The walls being built along the U.S./Mexico border are intended to stifle illegal immigration, but fail to address American policies that negatively affect life in Mexico and the root causes that force families apart and away from their homes. Walls separating Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods of Belfast



are intended to protect residents from violence, but instead limit opportunities for dialogue and the deconstruction of dehumanizing stereotypes.

Jesus broke down walls between people throughout his ministry, beginning when he chose disciples who were from groups who hated each other, such as Zealots and tax collectors. From interacting with Zacchaeus up in his tree, to the Samaritan woman at the well, to touching lepers outside city walls, to the Roman Centurion in need of a healing miracle, Christ made a habit of scampering over and around cultural walls. He spoke to people society told him not to, went where he should not have, said what Jews dared not.

In Ephesians, Paul is specific that Jesus was intentional. "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (Ephesians 2:13-14). These days our security is defined in terms of the distance separating our enemies from us. Though communication technology shrinks our planet on a daily basis, the barriers our "security" requires grow ironically larger and larger. By opening up and learning about each other—turning barriers perpendicular—we can build bridges of peace and understanding.

Sermon seeds (ideas for preaching)

Dividing walls—It didn't take long for early Christian bodies to start splintering. The Apostle Paul often addressed those issues in the early churches. "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them" (Romans 16:17). In a letter to Corinth, divisions are such an issue that he mentions it already in the first chapter. "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). After a disagreement about the distribution of food in Acts 6:1-6, civil discussion is a means of

overcoming barriers within a body of believers. In Mark 9:38-41, Jesus admonishes John for stopping someone driving out demons in Christ's name, saying, "Whoever is not against us is for us." Simply dismissing Christians with whom we disagree doesn't usually work out well. In fact, listening and conversing can often help us gain insights about ourselves. The divisions of language and worship within our own church can deepen rifts, causing us to not even be able to communicate within our own body. It can be possible to gain wisdom from someone with profound theological differences.

Security walls—Walls in the Old Testament tend to show up in the context of city fortifications seemingly tailor-made for the Israelite army to violently destroy, such as in Deuteronomy 3. A city's security is often measured by the thickness of its walls, but the Lord says otherwise. (See what happened to Jericho in Joshua 6:1-27 and Hebrews 11:30.) In a dream to Zechariah (2:4-5), an angel said to him, "'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'" Humans have often found it easiest to invest their security in physical walls, which diminishes faith in the Lord. Before causing the thick-as-locusts camp of Midianites to destroy themselves with their own weapons (Judges 7:1-25), the Lord tells Gideon that the military is far too large and will boast of itself rather than their God after victory, so Gideon trims it from 32,000 to 300. Carrying only trumpets and jars containing fire, the 300 drew no weapons and surrounded the Midianites, broke open the jars, blew their trumpets, and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" Are we willing to put our security solutions in God's hands today? How do walls physically and/or psychologically inhibit our vision and shape our perceptions?

Containing walls—How do the physical walls of a church building keep what's inside from getting out into the community and vice versa? Debate about a proposed church building project can sometimes create walls before the actual ones even go up. How do we keep physical church walls from becoming psychological walls as well?

Sample worship service

Gathering

Gathering hymns

"O Prince of peace,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 15

"We are people of God's peace,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 407

"Dona nobis pacem,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 346
(or 294)

Lighting the peace lamp

Sing the Journey, No. 121

(Peace lamps are free. If your congregation doesn't have one, contact peace@MennoniteUSA.org.)

God of peace, Christ of peace, Spirit of peace,
You are calling us to be peacemakers—in
our homes, in our church, in our community,
in our world. Today, we light this lamp as a
reminder of our calling.

Call to worship

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 733 (or 716)

Or, *Sing the Journey*, No. 143

Prayer

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 760 (or 294)

Passing the peace

"May the peace of Christ be with you."

"And also with you."

Praising

Songs of praise

"Heart with loving heart united,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 420

"In Christ there is no East or West,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 306

Offering

Consider taking a special offering for your congregation's local peace work and the Peace and Justice Support Network (PJSN) of Mennonite Church USA. PJSN is mostly

self-supporting, and welcomes your financial support to carry out the vision of promoting peace and justice within the church. More information on special offerings is available at www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace.

Confessing

We are a people skilled at building walls.

We confess they are too often a comfort.

In time, these divisions crack and crumble.

Too often, we mend and rebuild, strengthening separations.

We keep the walls between us as we go. To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Why do good fences make good neighbors?
Isn't it where there are cows?

But here there are no cows.

— Based on *Mending Wall* by Robert Frost

Hearing

- Scripture—Mark 9:38-41
- Children's time (back)
- Scripture—Ephesians 2:11-22
- Sermon (see Sermon seeds)

Responding

Words of affirmation

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 711

Response songs

"For we are strangers no more,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 322

"Christ, from whom all blessings,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 365

"As tranquil streams,"

Sing the Journey, No. 51

"Make me a channel of your peace,"

Sing the Journey, No. 56

Sending

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 760 (or 736)

Or, *Sing the Journey*, No. 154



Ideas for children

1 Bring some building blocks or Legos and construct a wall, showing how each piece is small and easy to move. The finished project is much larger and difficult to get over or around. Using dolls or action figures, show how it's easier to start and escalate a conflict over the wall if the parties cannot directly see each other. Do we sometimes build walls in our lives?

2 Discuss how cement dries and becomes stone-like, making a brick wall much easier to build than dismantle. Can a problem with others easily get bigger, even though Jesus taught us how to forgive?

Words of assurance

Know this: "You were separate from Christ ... without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier" (Ephesians 2:12-14).

Agreeing and disagreeing in love

For a much more in-depth look at addressing differences of opinion within a church body, visit the 2009 Columbus convention "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" resources available online at www.MennoniteUSA.org.

More resources on Peace Sunday— including many additional materials that won't fit here—are available on the Peace and Justice Support Network's website at www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace.



For peace and justice resources, or to join the Network, visit www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace, or check us out on Facebook. For more information about PJSN, or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material, contact Peace@MennoniteUSA.org. **Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thank you for your support.**