

March 2010, *Equipping* #104

Many People's Sunday

May 2, 2010

This worship resource, which emphasizes the multicultural and multiracial nature of Mennonite Church Canada, was prepared by Nestor Raul Bogoya, a member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, MB.

Scripture Texts: Psalm 148, John 13:31-35, Acts 11:1-18, Revelation 21:1-6

Introduction:

In today's world, we are told to think globally and to act locally. The church is called to do the same. The world has changed, is changing, and will keep changing. Therefore, to adapt itself to the new realities we face in the world, the church must keep changing as well. An increasing number of people are migrating and we may be the most mobile generation in the history of the world. People move for many different reasons, including employment options and the desire to try something new. However, many are not fortunate enough to move out of their own choice. Many people need to move because of politics, religion, war, and poverty. Canada, like many other countries in the northern hemisphere, has received many immigrants in the past twenty years, who come to raise their families, to work hard, and to prosper, just like many Canadians who immigrated in earlier generations. New immigrants share other Canadians' search for security, self-worth, and being valued as people.

The make-up of Mennonite Church Canada has been changing because of these immigrants. We worship in many languages every Sunday. The growth we are experiencing among MC Canada congregations is largely due to the many immigrants we receive every year. This is something we will continue experiencing for years to come.

As we celebrate *Many People's Sunday*, we want churches to be intentional and choose people from different cultures to plan the worship. Here are some suggestions to help you plan this celebration:

- Find a location that can provide enough space for two or more congregations to hold a joint service.
- Decorate with fabric and symbols from different cultures.
- Encourage the congregation to dress in clothing that represents different cultures.
- Invite a preacher who speaks the most common language.
- Consider having other ethnic groups provide interpreters in "whisper style" around the people who need translation to make good use of worship time.
- Invite a music team to lead the singing. Music teams are common to most worship cultures and make it easier for others to offer their voices in song.
- Conclude the worship with a multicultural potluck as a love feast and an opportunity for building relationships.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11

Sermon Suggestions for Acts 11:1-18:

In the book of Acts, we are told that the apostle Peter was criticized by the circumcised believers (the Jews) because he ate with the uncircumcised (the Gentiles). Peter began to explain to his fellow believers what he saw in a dream. After he finished the story, he concluded with the comment that the Spirit told him “not to make any distinction between them and us” (Acts 11:12). The Holy Spirit had indeed broken the barrier for Peter with which he had separated the Jews and the Gentiles. God was at work making them into one humanity, one people. This work of God continues among us today.

The traditions we have created have formed us as communities, but they have also separated us from others, whether we intended them to or not. Like Peter, we are called to break through the barriers and stop making distinctions between us and other peoples. Jesus has redeemed us into one human race in which there is no Jew, nor Gentile, no woman, no man, no German-Swiss, no Chinese, no Vietnamese, no Hispanic. Peter added: “If then God gave them (*the gentiles*) the same gift (*the Holy Spirit*) that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (Acts 11:17). Our call is to set aside our prejudices and embrace others as part of our faith family. Let us not hinder God’s work of building the growing family of God, to which we all belong, but open our hearts and communities so we can all give glory and honour to God who makes us one.

Suggested Songs:

It is good to find hymns that can be learned easily or sung in more than one language. We have a nice range of songs in our three worship books – *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, *Sing the Journey*, and *Sing the Story*.

For example:

HWB 395	<i>Here I am, Lord</i> - Gathering
HWB 397	<i>God loves all his many people</i> - Gathering
HWB 400	<i>Santo, santo, santo</i> - Gathering
HWB 407	<i>We are people of God’s peace</i> - Gathering
HWB 420	<i>Heart with loving heart united</i> – Gathering
HWB 422	<i>Bwana awabariki</i> – Blessing
HWB 427	<i>You shall go out with joy</i> – Sending
HWB 299	<i>New earth, heavens new</i> – Proclaiming/ Responding
STJ 2	<i>Hamba nathi (Come, walk with us)</i> - Gathering
STJ 18	<i>Over my head</i> - Praise
STJ 37	<i>Miren que bueno (Behold, how pleasant)</i> – Proclaiming
SJT 64	<i>Somos el cuerpo de Cristo</i> – Witnessing
STS 94	<i>Sithi Bong (We sing praises)</i> – Praise
STS 115	<i>Beauty for brokenness</i> – Responding

GATHERING

Call to Worship

Psalm 148 There is a lovely arrangement, and slight adaptation, of this Psalm, “Praise the Lord, all you deeps,” by Samson Lo, Director, Multi-Cultural Ministry, Mennonite Church Canada, in *Words for Worship 2*, (2009, Herald Press) #38.

Invocation

Eternal God,

you have called us to be members of one body.
Join us with those who, in all times and places,
have praised your name,
that, with one heart and mind, we may show unity of your church,
and bring honour to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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Confession/Reconciling (use these prayers consecutively, as one, racially uniting)

Merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy, forgive what we have been,
help us amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.

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Oh, Great Spirit, who made
all the races, look kindly
upon the human family
and takes away the arrogance
and hatred which separates
us from our brothers and sisters.
(Cherokee prayer from the public domain)

Words of Assurance

“The one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new. ...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water, [and to the contrite I will give forgiveness] as a gift from the water of life.” Excerpted from Revelation 21: 5-6.

Hymn: Choose one from the list above or of your own choice.

Hearing The Word

(Invite individuals to prepare and read the following Scripture texts.)

Psalms 148	Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35	Acts 11: 1-18

Children’s Time

See *Leader: Equipping the Missional Congregation*, spring 2010, page 39, for a brief retelling of the story in Acts 11:1-18, and encouragement to re-enact Peter’s vision with a sheet and some stuffed animals. Reflect with the children about how God is still teaching us lessons about reaching out. God hopes we will play with and love people from different cultures who speak different languages and eat different foods than we do, because all of us belong to God’s big family.

MEDITATION

Responding Hymns – Choose one from the list above or one of your own choice.

Offering Prayer

God has shown us the meaning of generosity

in the beautiful diversity of creation,

in the overflowing love of Jesus Christ,

in the never-ending gift of the Holy Spirit.

God has abundantly blessed us and called us

to be a community that honours each other,

to serve others with joy,

to share our love and material possessions.

Let us rejoice in what we have been given

and in what is ours to give. Amen.

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Benediction

May the grace of Christ, which daily renews us,
and the love of God, which enables us to love all,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which unites us in one body,
make us eager to obey the will of God until we meet again,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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