

# Worshiping beyond DISCRIMINATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Did you know that congregations across Mennonite Church Canada and USA worship in more than 15 languages? This Sunday is an opportunity to thank God and celebrate this diversity of the crown of God's creation, the human race. The face of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA continues to change. In urban areas we see more people from different ethnic groups making those cities their homes. Some of them are, or choose to become, Mennonites. As a result, a multicultural Mennonite mosaic is growing and adding new colors, sounds, and flavors to our church world. We have the opportunity to recreate a vivid picture of the image presented to us in the book of Revelation, where people from every nation, tribe, people, and language stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were not just standing still before Christ; they were worshiping and praising him.

Instead of letting diversity separate us, diversity can bring us together. Worship can be the channel for the Holy Spirit to affirm God's gift of unity to the church. The Holy Spirit also moves in our hearts as we consider that those who are different from us deeply desire to be embraced by us. This worship resource can also help us embrace and include those who are different because of special needs, whether those needs be disabilities, homelessness, or poverty. Let us celebrate with an open mind, heart, and spirit, so we glorify God and worship God in spirit and in truth.

## THEME: WORSHIPING BEYOND DISCRIMINATION

**Helpful tips:** Let worship committees and worship pastors or leaders implement some of the following ideas (depending on human and material resources):

- Invite a person of a different race, culture, ability or economic level to give a short testimony of how he or she has been welcomed and embraced in your church.

- Invite a singer, musician, or worship band from a visible minority congregation to do a special musical number during the service.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation of the diversity you see in your neighborhood or in the neighborhood of your church building.
- Create a PowerPoint of the many peoples (different) in your congregation, or show this video from Mennonite Church Canada: [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1945](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1945).
- Invite someone who differs from your congregational norm to church on Sunday. Offer that person the needed support in order for him/her to attend and worship with you.
- Follow the worship service with an ethnic food festival. Ask people to bring food from different cultures.

## MUSIC

Many Peoples Sunday should include songs that declare God's creation and could be sung in different languages.

### *Suitable songs:*

*HWB 55 "Cantemos al Señor" (Let's Sing unto the Lord)*

*HWB 7 "Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather"*

*HWB 397 "God Loves All His Many People"*

*HWB 306 "In Christ There Is No East or West"*

*HWB 322 "For We Are Strangers No More"*

*HWB 407 "We Are People of God's Peace"*

*STJ 64 "Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo"  
(We Are the Body of Christ)*

*STJ 2 "Hamba Nathi" (Come, Walk with Us)*



## CALL TO WORSHIP

(Gathering) Use the call to worship found in *HWB* 662, or use this antiphonal reading of Psalm 117:

Leader: All you peoples, praise the LORD

People: All you peoples praise him,

Leader: because the LORD loves us very much,

People: and his truth is everlasting.

## INVOCATION

*God our Creator, we worship and praise you for who you are.*

*We come to you with thanksgiving for the richness of your diversity.*

*God, you created us with diversity, and you created us with tender love.*

*As we celebrate our diversity, help us Lord, to understand your divine purpose in making us different.*

*Empower us to be instruments of unity and peace.*

*May your Holy Spirit guide us so we fully understand that your peace is a gift from you to the church and the world.*

*In the midst of diversity, help us remember that in Christ we are one.*

*Help us also remember that your glory fades away where there is favoritism and discrimination.*

*Help us remember that our identity is in Christ rather than in our differences.*

*Lord God, we are your people, your different and diverse people,*

*We ask your blessing upon our community, our church, and our families.*

*In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

## CHILDREN'S TIME

- **"Praise the Lord, all you people"** (Psalm 117:1-2)  
The psalmist invites us to worship God without discrimination. All the nations, all people are invited to recognize and affirm God's perfect love and endless faithfulness. It is not just an invitation to sing or pray, it is an invitation to extol God over anyone or anything. It invites us to celebrate the fact that now in "Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace,

who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14 NIV). As we celebrate, keep in mind that we will one day stand in worship before God in all our diversity. We can start doing it here and now, because the kingdom of God is already among us.

- **"No discrimination"** (James 2:1-5) James addresses the discrimination that was present in the different congregations where his letter was to be read. He tells them that favoritism does not please God. He tells them that wherever discrimination and favoritism is present God is not glorified; nor is God's glory in such a place. How do we treat those who are and look different than us? How do we react when a person with special needs sits beside us? How do we behave when a person with different political views from ours comes to worship in the same place we do? What if a person with different sexual orientation or practice wants to worship in our community of faith? How do we react when a person with a different skin color comes to our church? We should always keep in mind the rich and varied image of worship in Revelation 7:9-10.
- **"What Color is God's Skin?"** (Revelation 7:9-12) I remember that, long ago, in my elementary school the school principal asked the music teacher to teach us a song called "What Color is God's Skin?" At the time, we found the song to be a boring experience. As we moved from one grade to the next one, year after year, we continued to sing the same song. One day, the principal explained that the reason he asked the music teacher to teach the song and sing it every year was to make us aware of the diversity around us. He wanted us to embrace others, he wanted us to remove ethnic barriers and to accept each other as God does.

### **God's Skin (translated)**

*Good night I said to my little one,  
when exhausted he went to bed,  
Then, he lifted his eyes and asked with tenderness*

*Dad! What color is God's skin?*

*What color is God's skin?*

*What color is it?*

*I said: Yellow, Red, Black, Brown, and White,  
We are all the same in God's eyes.*

*With sadness in his eyes he looked at me,  
And then he asked:*

*Why is there so much racial and ethnic hate  
Why is there discrimination if, like you said, we are all  
the same in God's eyes?*



*Son, that is part of humanity's sad past,  
But soon it will come to an end.  
We are learning today for the coming future  
When we will live as children of God.  
Jesus has given us the opportunity  
To create a fraternal world  
Where the different ethnic groups and races  
Work united for a better world.*

Division through racial and ethnic conflict is not new to the church. Believers of the first century struggled with the same issues, and for that reason Paul wrote letters to them. They had a more difficult time than we do in overcoming their differences. Here we are, worshipping together, sometimes eating together, doing ministry, and playing together. There is still a lot to be done for us to resemble the multitude in John's Revelation, in chapter 7, verse 9, but I am optimistic and encouraged about what the church of Jesus Christ has been able to achieve in the last few years.

Those first-century believers had deprecating names to call each other, to refer to circumcised men as purer and better and to refer to uncircumcised men as impure and of a lesser category. They fiercely fought each other, did not relate with each other, and considered each other enemies. They judged each other for what they ate or didn't eat, and for their backgrounds. Praises be to the Lamb, yes, hallelujah to the one who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has overcome this enmity.

## LIVING TOGETHER WITH EACH OTHER

(Luke 6:26-33) Now that we are in Christ, we are God's people. The Bible also says that we belong to the family of God. If we are God's family, God's people, we must learn how to live together with each other. We better start practicing here because we will spend eternity together in God's presence. How can we do that? Here are some biblical tips:

1. Loving each other (John 13:34)
2. Encouraging each other (I Thessalonians 5:11)
3. Bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2-3)
4. Forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:32)
5. Not provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:26)
6. Admonishing each other with wisdom (Colossians 3:16)

Doing what the Word of God says will bring us together. When we live together in unity we honor Jesus' prayer (John 17:20-23): "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (NIV).

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Allow seven to 10 minutes for people to respond to the message. Invite people to express how they feel about being part of God's many people.

## CONFESSING PRAYER

The prayer found in *HWB* 696 is very appropriate, especially if it follows a time of personal silent confession.

## RESPONDING SONG

*HWB* 322 "For We Are Strangers No More"

## BENEDICTION

Gracious God, as we get ready to leave this place of worship, we thank you for Jesus Christ, who is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. We are no longer strangers to each other. Regardless of any kind of diversity or difference, we are your many people. The world will know that you are in us, and that we are in you, as we love each other with pure hearts. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.