

WORSHIPING God all together

by Dan Nighswander

INTRODUCTION

The Mennonite Church Canada and USA has become ethnically and racially diverse. Our potluck meals include bannock and borscht, spring rolls and cabbage rolls, samosas and sushi. This variety is God's intention for the church and is a great blessing to us. So it is right and good that we acknowledge and praise God, because "once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10)—all of us together.

The obvious way to celebrate this diversity is to worship with people from many cultures and languages. Consider these worship plan options:

- Plan a joint worship service with a church that differs culturally and linguistically;
- Invite a preacher and music team from an ethnicity that differs from that of most of your church members;
- Draw on the various languages and ethnicities that are available in your church and community;
- Sing praises in a variety of languages—it will help you to prepare for heaven (Revelation 7:9-12);
- Share a multicultural potluck meal in anticipation of the heavenly feast (Revelation 19:9).

THEME: WORSHIPING GOD ALL TOGETHER

Jesus prayed, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine" (John 17:10). Jesus included all of his followers in one family of faith. His followers belong to God and they also belong to each other. Today we especially recognize that this includes people of many languages, cultures, and origins. We are destined to worship God together. Let's start now.

MUSIC

This is a good Sunday to sing hymns that can be sung in more than one language and songs that originate in other cultures:

HWB 7 "Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather"
(Japanese)

HWB 9 "Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome" (First Nations)

Bryan Moyer Suderman's "God's Love Is for Everybody" (www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/284) is a good theme song

Additional suitable songs:

STJ 9 "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship" (draw attention to "one day ev'ry knee will bow" as God's intention for a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual church)

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

STJ 72 "One Is the Body"

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

STS 106 "Comme un Souffle Fragile" (Like a Tender Breath, Stirring) (French)

STS 117 "How Can I Say"

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

HWB 307 "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant"

HWB 322 "For We Are Strangers No More"

HWB 367 "For the Healing of the Nations"

HWB 371 "Let There Be Light, Lord God"

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

GATHERING

(If possible, present the call to worship in several languages, simultaneously, or one after another)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 68:32-35:

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord,

Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies.

Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;

God gives power and strength to his people.

Blessed be God!

INVOCATION

*Creator of humanity, in the dignity of your own image;
Redeemer of humanity, in our common, desperate need;*

Sustainer of humanity, in our shared longing for your blessing:

We are your people, your children.

Together with all your children of every nation, race, people, and tongue we gather in your presence to sing your praise. Accept our humble offering of thanks and worship, we pray, for the sake of your Son, Jesus, by whose death we are made your children, sisters and brothers together.

Amen.

Words of Praise: HWB 680

CONFESSING

STJ 132

or

Confession of Sin:

Holy God,

We dare to come before you only because we know you are full of steadfast mercy.

We confess that even though we call you our Parent we are not worthy of you.

We confess that we have not loved you with our whole

heart, soul, and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors, even our sisters and brothers in faith, as we love ourselves.

We have acted as if we are not your children and pretended that we don't belong to you.

Forgive, we pray, our failures to do what we ought to do and our shameful success in doing what we ought not to do.

In your mercy, prompt us and strengthen us to become the people you intend us to be, both individually and all together.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, our only hope. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness: 1 John 1:5-7

“Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, ‘We have fellowship with him,’ while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.”

Confession of Faith: STJ 135 – Hispanic/English Creed (or, HWB 716)

Prayer: STJ 142 (consider changing “nations” to “cultures” in first line)

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Scripture selections and sermon seeds:

Book of Ruth: In this story we see how a non-Jew joined the people of God and became part of salvation history, one of Jesus' direct ancestors. Naomi and Boaz model how to incorporate people of different cultures and religious backgrounds into our churches and families.

Acts 10:34-36: Peter discovers that God accepts people of every ethnicity. This discovery is the most shattering change in worldview that early Christians experienced and the opening through which gentiles come into the family of faith. What does it say to the question of “Mennonite ethnicity?”

Revelation 7:9-12: John foresees a time when people of every ethnicity—tribe, people, and language—will worship God together. This Scripture, perhaps combined with the ascension theme, draws our

attention to our future hope, which brings together people of all ethnicities at the feet of Jesus in worship. Focus on the many expressions of worship that are enhanced by cultural influences (language, dance or not-dance, musical styles and instruments, congregational participation).

CHILDREN'S TIME

Present the two person dialogue between Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:1-18) emphasizing that Naomi helped her Moabite daughter-in-law find a welcome among her Jewish people. Wonder together about how God helped Naomi's people accept Ruth, the Moabite.

CHILDREN'S STORY

Ruth Joins Naomi's People (Ruth 1:1-18)

by Elsie Rempel*

(Props: create a traveling "path" to Bethlehem with masking tape or string on the floor. Ruth and Naomi can wear shawls. Ruth and Naomi talk as they slowly walk along the path to "Bethlehem.")

Naomi: Hello, oh, it's so good to see some children for a change. Children always cheer me up a little. My daughter-in-law, Ruth, and I have been walking for many days, and we haven't met many children on the road. You see, we don't have any of our own children, at least not any more. I had two fine sons once, Mahlon and Chillion, but they died. *(If the group is small, invite them to walk with you.)*

Ruth: Yes, they died, but you still have two daughters-in-law, mother. Don't forget; we still love you.

Naomi: Of course, of course. Yes, you and Orpah are good to me. Are you sure you don't want to go back to your Moabite family like Orpah did, so that her parents can find a new husband for her?

Ruth: How often must I tell you, Naomi? I do not want to leave you or your God. Your God has become my God, and your people will become my people when we get to Bethlehem.

Naomi: I hope so. It's been a long time since Elimelech and I left Bethlehem. The boys were still young, like these children here. Some people were angry that we went to seek food and work in Moabite territory, but the drought was so awful in Bethlehem. Our crops were so meager we were afraid our boys would starve.

Ruth: They'll understand, Naomi. They won't be angry with you anymore; not after all those years.

Naomi: But, do you think they'll remember me? I was young and lovely then, but that was so long ago.

Ruth: Naomi, you are old, but your eyes are lovely and still look young when you laugh.

Naomi: When I laugh, you say. I haven't laughed for a long time, but perhaps Bethlehem will bring back some happy memories.

Ruth: I'm sure it will. Tell me about the land that will belong to us.

Naomi: I hope it will belong to us. We'll have to see about finding a relative to redeem it for us. But, what is it like? Well, it has gentle hills, and it's lovely and green after the rains come. Our house had a bench outside for watching the sunset. I wonder if it's still there.

Ruth: What a lovely thought to look forward to. I could use a bench for resting about now. But we need to keep walking to make it to that next village before dark. God has been protecting us as we travel, but the dangers really increase after dark. I'm so glad you're letting me come with you. I hope your people will accept me as you have. They're not all very friendly toward us Moabites, are they?

Naomi: Oh no, definitely not. But stick with me and I'll introduce you to the friendlier ones first. Take my fine cousin, Boaz, for example. I think he's quite friendly and open-minded. Perhaps he'll let you work as a gleaner on his fields. The harvest will begin soon, and I think gleaning on his fields will be our best chance at starting over in Bethlehem.

Ruth: Well, if he is your relative, he should be respectful to me. Your people will be my people, and your God, who is protecting us on this dangerous journey, is my God too, and will protect me there as well. Surely, they will see that I honor both you and your God.

Naomi: Yes, my dear Ruth, you really do honor me and do love my God faithfully. I am grateful that you are my daughter and are becoming part of my people. I will do all I can and God will help my people welcome you and accept you.

**Adapted from a story written for Centered Teaching: People Who Love God Differently, Cycle C, Fall, session 13. Copyright 2006 by Faith & Life Resources. Used by permission.*

RESPONDING AND SENDING

Offering Prayer: HWB 750

BENEDICTION

As we go from this place, be blessed by the knowledge that you belong to Jesus, you belong to God. Look around: you are surrounded by sisters and brothers who also belong to God. One day the whole family of

God's children will gather to sing in every language and worship in every expression of praise. We have practiced for that today.

Now, as you go out from here, share the grace of Jesus Christ with each other. Be immersed together in God's love. Enjoy fellowship in the Holy Spirit with your sisters and brothers.

Amen.

“The most serious threat to the struggle against racism, fascism, and injustice is the **eroding of the dignity and sense of worth**, the subversion of the human spirit. When people cease to see themselves as agents of change, but merely objects of manipulation, **they are lost**.”

—*Kenneth Leech, The Essential Kenneth Leech (Seabury Press, 2009)*