

Come Lord Jesus, be our Host

Cover and chapter art are designed for users to copy and colour meditatively while they reflect on and discuss the questions. The artist, Joanna Gerber Pinkerton, created the doodle art for the Year of the Bible project of MCUSA. She attends Hope MC in Wichita, Kansas.

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Introduction

An inner-city congregation celebrates communion by opening doors to all who wish to participate. Another congregation, not too far away, limits participation to baptized members only. Where communion was once celebrated in similar fashion with shared perspectives of theology, current variations in communion practice reflect new understandings of church and embodied worship.

It's time to stop and take a good look at what we really believe about communion. Do our actions reflect our beliefs? Mennonites have become increasingly ecumenically involved and have gained respect and appreciation for the practices of other denominations. Many of us have new levels of appreciation for liturgy and sacrament.

This booklet is intended to help guide conversations as congregations navigate the waters of change surrounding the Lord's Table. It provides reflections and tools such as summarized research, sample litanies, and discernment processes. Each chapter ends with a doodle graphic as well as questions. The graphic is there for users to copy and colour meditatively while they reflect on and discuss the questions.

My hope is that this study guide will help congregations articulate what they believe about communion. Hopefully, this will help them celebrate communion faithfully in ways that respect our tradition, honour Jesus as host, and help form and celebrate faith for all ages. Such communion practices would winsomely invite all, including unbaptized youth and adults, to commit or recommit their lives to Jesus and his church.

We may be shaped and fed by our roots, but like plants, we also respond to current climate conditions. We need both continuity with the past and elements of adaptive change born from present circumstances. In *Come Lord Jesus, be Our Host*, statements from *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* represent the heritage that continues to shape us. In addition, glimpses of current denominational discernment practices guide adaptive changes to our beliefs and practices about children, adolescents, and communion.

As Mennonite Church Canada's former General Secretary, Robert J. Suderman offered three approaches to reviewing wider discernment practices. They work well for this topic, too:

- 1. The church can repeat again what it has said before
- 2. The church can modify what it has said before, given some new spiritual understandings, or
- 3. The church can change what it has said before because new perspectives have become apparent and compelling.¹

After your congregation engages this study, you will collectively respond with one of those three options. I hope you will do so with a deeper appreciation for the role of communion in your congregation's worship life.



Session 1: The Heart of Communion

- Mystery and Attraction
- Why Communion Matters
- Reflecting on Communion History
- Changing Times and New Perspectives
- Impacts of Change on our Practice
- Let's Talk

Mystery and Attraction

Communion is an ancient faith practice that is rich in symbolism, action, and history. It extends an invitation into mystery and the concept of God among us, of God who feeds us and longs for communion with us. This appeal and mystery extends to everyone, even those who are not yet, by traditional standards, eligible to take part because they have not been baptized. There are good reasons why communion has historically been reserved for those who are baptized, yet there are also good reasons for widening the invitation.

For example, the practice of communion is formative for the faith lives of children, who are drawn to activities that involve physical participation and learn well from it. Many who love and work with children long to welcome them more fully into our communion services. Together with children, they want to meet, re-enact, and remember Jesus' table as a place for fellowship and intimate community.

Across the church, we find many young adults who are committed to faith and walk the Jesus way, but don't feel ready for baptism. For some, the choice may be due to doctrinal matters. For others, it may result from the church's stance on a particular issue or issues. We long for unbaptized youth and young adults, the committed as well as the ambivalent and sceptical, to hear and respond to Jesus' invitation to sup with him.

How can those who are not yet baptized respond to the mysterious attraction of communion and experience Jesus as host? This growing concern creates tension between historical practices and new ideas of what communion might be. That tension is reflected through inconsistencies in practices and articulated theologies. Perspectives vary within each congregation, from one congregation to the next, and in the changing world around us. Reflecting on these matters together will help us consider the wide variety of perspectives and experiences that shape the way we, as one small segment of the people of God, understand and celebrate communion. It may even help us bring our theology and practice into step with each other.

Why Communion Matters

Whether described as an ordinance, a ritual, or a sacrament, communion is a core practice of the church. Many denominations, including Mennonites, call it an ordinance because Jesus ordered us to do it in remembrance of him. Other denominations call it a sacrament because they understand its actions, prayers, and elements as a means of receiving God's grace. They also refer to the communion bread as the "Host," because Jesus says, "This is my body," and Jesus is the host of this meal.

Communion combines significant faith-forming, faith-expressing, and faith-renewing language with symbolically powerful actions for the whole Christian community. During communion, we give thanks, remember, re-enact, and symbolically partake of Jesus' body broken for us and the new covenant of his blood (Luke22: 19-20, Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). We "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26) through acts of remembrance and witness. We confess, receive, and extend grace and forgiveness as we recommit ourselves to the way of the cross. Through communion, we experience the solidarity of the gathered body of Christ, as well as personal and communal growth in grace, in faith, in hope, and in love.

For Christians, Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), is spiritual food and drink. This truth becomes particularly potent when we gather at communion tables that acknowledge Christ as host and reflect on these words: "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me" (John 6: 53-57).

Accepting this life-giving food may seem like an irresistible invitation. And yet, Jesus' early followers found this teaching difficult, so difficult that it prompted many of them to stop following him (John 6:60, 66). Even as these words bless and feed our souls, they challenge us, because "feeding on Christ" and accepting the invitation to dwell in him calls us to die to ourselves even as we learn to live in him. They also challenge those in our midst who don't participate at communion. What must they think and feel as they hear: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (v.53)? Do those who are not yet baptized have no life in them?

But not all of the meals God and Jesus host exclude those who are not yet baptized. Many times divine hospitality sets the tone as God feeds and nurtures God's people in redeeming ways. Consider the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:4-14); the blessing of

Passover (Exodus 12); and the gifts of manna, quail, and water for the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16). And don't forget Elisha's feeding of 100 men with 20 barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44), or Isaiah's invitation to an abundant banquet that inaugurates God's reign (Isaiah 55:1-13). In the New Testament, Jesus builds on these earlier events and often provides food for those around him, whether they are committed followers or not.

These examples make it clear that God feeds his people on physical as well as spiritual levels. Some of these meals are offered widely as a sign of God's hospitable provision, while others are directed to select groups in more intimate settings. These meals provide a wider context for the supper Jesus hosts on the night that he is betrayed; the meal he instructs us to remember him by. Each biblically-based meal we now serve opens new windows for experiencing and responding to Jesus as host.

This booklet explores that continuum. Because each meal involves encountering and responding to God, each is an invitation to commune with God in spiritual and tangible ways. What are the implications for communion theology and practice?

Reflecting on Communion History

Contemporary New Testament scholarship suggests that primitive or Early Church Christian worship services were quite varied in nature. They report that Christian's early worship services were often integrated with meals, and reflected compatible aspects of Jewish and Greek banquet culture. In his book, *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations*, Paul Fike Stutzman reports that both cultures included time for sharing a meal, prayers, a dedicated cup—usually wine mixed with water—and a time for speeches, and songs.³

Stutzman writes: "Broadly speaking, in some places the evening Love Feast [which included the bread and cup accompanied by special prayers] seems to have continued to function as the primary worship celebration for churches after sun down on Saturday/the Sabbath, while in other places the church began meeting for worship before dawn on Sunday morning. The Sunday morning services consisted of prayers and instruction, and concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist, which was . . . now a token meal; the bread and the cup."⁴

There is even evidence that in the Carthage region from about 200 - 300 CE, "the fellowship meal of the early church occurred not only in homes, but also in prisons, where it served as a ministry to persecuted Christians and as a witness to unbelievers." 5

For most of church history, however, Christian churches have celebrated a particular meal of Jesus—the one referred to as Communion, The Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist—as a token meal of bread and wine, which is served only to the baptized, or baptized and confirmed.

Anabaptist tradition regards communion as an ordinance rather than a sacrament. In doing so, it has stressed remembering Jesus and being in right relationship with each other as well as with God. Mennonite congregations in North America used to instruct their congregants to reconcile with each other before participating in communion so they could approach the table "worthily." Some still do.

Historically, we protected the ordinance of communion by erecting fairly high walls around it. We celebrated behind closed doors as members of one specific and accountable congregation. John D. Rempel, a highly respected scholar on the topic of Anabaptist communion tradition, contends that "the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper has been safeguarded much more by the conservative influence of ritual than by theological exposition."

While not much was written about our communion theology, our Anabaptist ancestors understood the symbolism of drinking from a common cup, of ripping pieces and sharing one loaf of bread, and of nodding to the person next to them. Together, these actions were visible signs of being in right relationship with one another, and of acknowledging the congregation as Christ's body here on earth.

Rempel also writes that our communion practice incarnates our theology and "reveals more about what we believe about grace, the church, and mission than any other aspect of congregational life." We used to believe in the costly grace of a church that disciplined members whose lives did not agree with the church's confessed faith; in a pure church that was of one mind and opinion in matters of theology and lifestyle; of mission that bound up wounds, fed the hungry, and loved enemies. We dealt with differences through submission or by splintering into yet other varieties of Mennonites. We testified to this faith. We invited others to join us as we worshipped and followed Jesus in the narrow way of otherness that we understood to be true. The walls of otherness that separated us, that defined and protected our practices, were high.

Those walls of definition and protection are crumbling. In many places, they have disappeared. Our understandings of faithful discipleship, of worship, and of mission have also changed as we joined larger conversations of faith and life. But even as we face these shifts, our faith heritage includes valuable resources for faithfully serving and worshipping God today. And so we need to decide: are Mennonite Church congregations in the early 21st century called to cling to practices that fed and sustained us in the past, to adapt them, or to experiment with new practices that are closer to current theological understandings? This is at the heart of how and why we reflect on changes to our traditional communion practices. Do our currently varied communion practices faithfully express our desire to feed our deep hunger with Christ and to follow him in our lives? Could these variations be responses to how we see God reaching out to us in the midst of our current diversity? Are they signs of

our attempts to be faithful, or are they new ways of splintering the church that Jesus prayed would be one?

Such considerations can certainly add to conflict among us as we strive to live in Christ and "simply follow Jesus" together.⁸

Living in the rubble of post-Christendom uncertainties, we are challenged to explore new communion theology and practices that are rooted in the old, yet acknowledge and respond to our uncertain times. What our congregations believe about grace, the church, and mission is in a state of flux, which in turn is reflected in our varied communion practice. Articulating new theological statements about our communion practices may be the task of a future set of church leaders. For now, we seek to be faithful in an era of change.

Changing Times and New Perspectives

Participants were encouraged to wade into the waters of changing church life by David Driedger in his address to the 2014 Mennonite Church Canada Assembly. Driedger said that wading into change is the church's best option, much better than staying on the shore and providing critiques from its safety and distance.

Wading through waters of change, uncertainty, and diversity impacts every area of church life. Many questions surface in these waters, including those about whether, when, or if people should approach the waters of baptism. This in turn impacts communion practice, creating ambiguity and diversity around the participation of persons who are not (yet) baptized, including children. And so it is good to consider the theological and ecclesial implications of these varied approaches for the whole church, as well as for those precious members of the family of God who are neither baptized members nor outsiders.

Currently, varied communion practices indicate that we are indeed wading into the waters of change. We are responding to shifts in a post-modern and increasingly post-Christian world and in doing so, what we believe about grace, the church, and mission is changing. As we seek to live with increasing levels of diversity, we are developing new understandings of grace and of the church as a body that can be unified in spite of disagreement on issues that have traditionally divided us.⁹

The way we value three critical and interrelated aspects of faith—a triangle of belonging, behaving, and believing—is shifting. For much of church history, "correct" belief was considered the most essential ingredient of faith and church membership. If one agreed with orthodox belief, one could belong. It was hoped that correct Christian behaviour would follow, though only members of religious orders were expected to actually live according to Christ's teachings. Our Anabaptist forefathers and mothers felt this approach was inadequate, and that the

commitment to righteous living should be evident before an adult was baptized into church membership. However, correct belief remained an essential part of belonging to a congregation.

In post modernity, even for descendants of the Anabaptist faith, the relationships between belonging, behaving, and believing are shifting. Sometimes it seems as if belonging is the new priority in this triangle.

According to Stuart Murray, spokesperson for the United Kingdom's Anabaptist Network, "Some believe but don't belong; some belong before believing—lots, we know, since the Decade of Evangelism research which found people journey slowly to faith. What has prompted this shift? Post modernity—suspicion of institutions, lack of understanding of the gospel. Many emerging churches practise belonging before believing." 10

How we value and prioritize these three aspects of faith impacts our communion practice, especially as we wade more deeply into the waters of diversity. In her book *Communion Shapes Character*, Eleanor Kreider notes that communion participation is increasingly viewed as a faith practice that builds the desire for baptism, in much the same way Christian belief and behaviour grow out of a sense of belonging to a faith community.¹¹ If this is how we view communion, does its function have more to do with faith formation and mission than with remembrance and renewing of baptismal vows? Or can these functions exist simultaneously?

Impacts of Change on our Practice

In contrast to traditionally clear messages about who was invited to the communion table, we now often send ambiguous messages during our invitation to the table. As baptized members sit among those who are not baptized, everyone can feel awkward and unsure of themselves during communion. This impacts our witness regarding grace, the church, and mission that are so integral to this meal that they can detract participants from the formative experience of being fed by our Lord. 12

Pastor Carrie Martens lamented the present lack of clarity at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario. "Right now in our congregation, the children generally participate by receiving a grape and a blessing, but it's far more awkward or unclear for unbaptized youth and adults. I do know of some congregations that have tried to find other solutions to that issue, by offering all unbaptized participants a blessing, regardless of age, but we're sitting in a very fuzzy place, essentially just using vague language. So the only really clear invitations are for baptized adults and children!" 13

Why has this happened? Here are some basic trends that impact our practice of communion:

Mennonite Church congregations observe communion more frequently than they used to. A recent study of North American Mennonites states: "Although North American Mennonites had traditionally observed communion twice a year, by the end of the twentieth century 43% GC (General Conference) and MC (Mennonite Church) Mennonite Congregations in the United States reported celebrating it 4 times a year and another 11% did so at least monthly." ¹⁴ In Canadian congregations, 69% reported quarterly participation in 1997, the last time such a survey was conducted. ¹⁵

We have moved the communion service into Sunday morning worship.

Communion services used to be held in the evening or after unbaptized worshippers had been dismissed following Sunday morning worship. Non-participants may have wondered what went on behind closed doors and perhaps even felt excluded, but communion practice remained conservative and expressed a fairly consistent theology. ¹⁶

Now, we often celebrate communion during Sunday morning worship in the presence of children and other unbaptized worshippers. This has led many Mennonites to adapt their practice, favouring greater levels of openness. For non-participants, communion has lost the mystery of what went on behind closed doors, but it still carries a sense of exclusion.

Today's more open practice may cause communion leaders and participants to wonder: is faith not nurtured by the lived and spoken message observers receive? Can communion be a missional testimony that invites others toward greater commitment? Isn't it strange and inhospitable to serve meals to only some of those present? Yet, what does it mean to ask the unbaptized to renew covenants they haven't made, or aren't ready to make? Would Jesus, who hosted many tables and regularly challenged the religious leaders by eating with sinners, have us be inclusive or exclusive with this special meal? We have responded in a variety of ways, sometimes without articulating the theology behind our newer, more open practices.

We experience communion in many more settings than we used to.

Retreats, visits to other denominations, and wider church events are a few examples of how communion is celebrated more broadly. This has implications for the depth of relationship between us and our fellow communicants, and for the degree of sanctity we accord to one particular practice.

We are less rigorous in our preparation for communion. Our spiritual leaders used to encourage reconciliation with fellow members in advance of communion Sunday. Now, confession of sins generally happens in a silent prayer of confession during the service.

Our society has extended the period of adolescence. Young adults face more decisions about life and education than their parents did. The cost of living for the lifestyles many have come to expect has become exorbitant, and as a result, young people tend to live at home longer. For many of today's young adults, the period for wondering whether or not they want to belong to a faith family also lasts longer. It isn't unusual for them to wait until their late twenties or early thirties to make long-term commitments like marriage and baptism. Integration into a stable community, once important, is no longer normative.

We have more unbaptized youth and young adults in our congregations than ever before. A shift has taken place in the way maturity is attained. While in the past youth and young adulthood were viewed as the time to integrate into a stable community—like church—today it has become a period of self-discovery and learning. As a result, young people have evolved into a transient, individualized community. "Society ha[s] restructured young adulthood as the most transient and individual-centered segment of life, while Mennonite theology assumed these were years of integration into a stable community." ¹⁷ This trend increases the number of unbaptized—but often believing—adults present at communion. Some of our congregations have as many unbaptized adults as unbaptized children. ¹⁸

We have more people in our churches from other Christian denominations. Often people from other denominations and their children were baptized as infants, and because of this they see no reason to keep them from participating in communion. Many of these newer Mennonites come from non-Caucasian cultures and language groups. This introduces us to many other communion traditions. 19

Let's Talk

- 1. What memories of communion, before and after you were allowed to participate, do you bring to this conversation?
- 2. What are your thoughts about the gifts and the challenges of communion?
- 3. What does your current communion practice reflect about your congregation's beliefs about grace, about church, and about mission?
- 4. What factors push your congregation to change or maintain your communion practice?
- 5. What other factors in your congregation impact your communion practice?



Session 2: Many Tables

- Picking Tables
- Passover
- Covenant Renewal
- Paul's Communion Instructions
- Meals of Recognition
- God's Nourishing Miracles
- Heavenly Foretastes
- Let's Talk

Picking Tables

There are a number of approaches to establishing a biblical context for communion. We could focus on all the tables at which Jesus is reported to have eaten, as the Baptist Union of Great Britain does in their booklet, *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion.*²⁰ That would emphasize Jesus' gracious embrace of outsiders. We could restrict our reflection to accounts of the Last Supper in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians, for which there is a long and strong tradition. That would limit the focus to what Jesus emphasizes on the night he is betrayed.

Instead of taking either of those approaches, this booklet deliberately chooses a third way of focusing on biblical meals where Jesus is the host, one that opens our practice to include Jesus' wider table hospitality. These other tables offer additional possibilities for meals of full inclusion without detracting from the Last Supper's call to covenant renewal, another increasingly important aspect of Christian faith in our today's society.

Noel Moules, a church planter in the U.K.'s Anabaptist network, regularly experiences worship and communion through intergenerational gatherings around the table for meals. If the 21st century church finds renewal around tables that combine food, fellowship, and worship as Noel Moules²¹ and other emerging church folk predict, then we can learn much from studying the practices of Jesus as table host.

Jesus' tables have numerous expressions and emphases. As the church wades through waters of uncertainty and change, it may find its way by integrating the emphases and unique flavours of these meals into communion practices. Whether or not these other meals can be considered communion or assume another name—like Love Feasts, for example—is a matter for further discernment. For now, let's consider the unique gifts each of these meals offers to the church.

Passover

Exodus 12: 1-28 (the first Passover); Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-28, and Luke 22:19-20 (Jesus' last Passover with disciples); John 13: 1-20 (Jesus washes disciples' feet at Passover).

Since Jesus is celebrating the annual Passover feast when he inaugurates communion, it is perhaps fitting to address it first. The inauguration of Passover is found in Exodus 12:1-28, and takes place while the Israelites are in bondage. It serves to remind them of God's salvation, grace, and mercy as God moved to free Israel from Egyptian slavery. It challenges them to live peaceably with each other as God's people.

Passover menu items and rituals carry deep symbolic meaning and help participants re-enact the experience of God freeing Israel from slavery. One ritual that makes it particularly interesting for children is that they are traditionally invited to set the stage for retelling the salvation story by asking the question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

Passover was and is a family-based celebration conducted in Jewish and some Christian family households. As such, it is naturally inclusive of all ages and stages of faith. A communion service that builds on Passover roots could similarly include the church's children and unbaptized youth. Their biblically-rooted role of asking "the question" in the service would honour good questions at a time in life when there are many, even as it triggers the telling of the Salvation story.

Just as the early Israelites remembered Passover, young people would be reminded of God's saving activity in our big story as they receive the food, and reflect on the significance of food that is served. "Strangers and sojourners may join," wrote Waldemar Janzen in 2000, "but only upon serious commitment of themselves to this community." We may not consider our children, youth, and unbaptized young adults to be strangers and sojourners, but this does open the door to wider participation in the meal.

Celebrating the Jewish Passover in a Christian setting may appear to be an incomplete sign of God's saving action, but it could increase appreciation for the Jewish tradition that shaped Jesus' spirituality. ²³ Some Christians celebrate Passover services with added layers of meaning particularly relevant to Christians, such as linking Jesus to the Passover Lamb and integrating his words at the last Supper about bread and the cup. Doing this follows the example Jesus sets during his last Passover with his disciples, and gives the church sufficient reason to acknowledge Jesus as host at a Passover meal without detracting from the completeness of Jewish Passover.

Covenant Celebration and Renewal

Genesis 26:26-31 (Isaac and Abimelech), Mark 14:22-24 (Jesus' Passover with disciples), Matthew 26:26-28 (Institution of Lord's Supper), Luke 22:19-20 (Institution of Lord's Supper), John 13: 1-20 (Jesus washes disciples' feet).

Covenants were celebrated with shared meals in the Old Testament. The first of these takes place in Genesis 26: 26-31, where Isaac and Abimelech make a peace treaty after a long conflict over access to water.²⁴ Jesus' new covenant of *shalom*, sealed with the shedding of his blood and foreshadowed in Genesis, can be understood in terms of a new and more enduring peace treaty than the one celebrated by Isaac and Abimelech.

Covenant renewal remains an important aspect of communion for many. This aspect requires a closed table, since a covenant can only be renewed by those who have made it. Many of our congregations choose to set Maundy Thursday or Good Friday communion apart as a separate closed service, at which baptized believers are exhorted to remember Jesus' sacrifice and renew their commitments—their covenant—to live and die with Christ.

Others see a valuable opportunity for witness and instruction throughout this pivotal week in Jesus' ministry and deliberately celebrate communion in the presence of the whole congregation. This type of "in the open" communion stresses recovenanting. It can create a sense of longing and anticipation in those who are not yet baptized.

While North American culture cultivates continual dissatisfaction and instant gratification for the purpose of consumerism, the church sees longing as fertile ground for spiritual growth and development. Rather than persuading people to satisfy their longings prematurely, encouraging them to wait and deepen longing will help to refine and shape action and commitment.²⁵

Congregations who celebrate the idea that there are no fences around Jesus' table, but also recognize the importance of covenant renewal, can add an annual ritualized membership renewal service. People who wish to remain members might come forward to sign a membership roll. This could be done separately or as part of a communion service.

Paul's Communion Instructions (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)²⁶

This text offers the church something unique with its explicit liturgical instruction. As such, it is a foundational text shaping communion liturgy in all churches. Interestingly enough, these instructions are set in the context of a congregation conflicted about waiting for all members to arrive—including those who were slaves and had to work longer hours—before beginning their fellowship meal and communion service.

Through these instructions, Paul teaches proper attitudes and practices for observing the Early Church's meal remembering Jesus' death and sacrifice. He challenges participants to honour their unity in Christ; a unity which transcends social divides. When Paul encourages the Corinthian congregation to remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples, he expects them to respond by living in light of Jesus' sacrificial love.

Since then, the church has worried about what it means to partake unworthily, often without examining or addressing the wider social issues that were part of the communion conflict in the Corinthian church and those that are part of current circumstances. Often this discussion has included how we welcome those who are not baptized, be they children, youth, or adults. While Paul's instructions do not refer to the participation of the unbaptized, we can't be sure that they were not present. Those who promote an open table often assume that families must have been present. However, early church records²⁷ refer to communion being a closed and closely-guarded event that was first experienced after baptism. For most of church history, this has certainly been the case.

Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church also demonstrate how a Jewish Passover tradition was adapted and integrated into a Greek communal banquet tradition. Both traditions included a full meal, prayers, ritualised uses of wine, speeches, and songs. However, invitations to Greek banquets were extended to the socially prestigious, food and wine flowed freely, and the time for speeches and songs sometimes included debauchery and drunkenness. These social divisions and excesses are matters that Paul challenges as being incompatible with their new reality and unity in Christ.²⁸

Paul does more than provide the church with liturgical instruction. He offers an example for integrating and adapting traditional practices within our changing church cultures. Since Paul's concern centered on the importance of respecting Christ's sacrificial love and one's entire faith community, regardless of social status, his words can help us respect people with differing church membership status, even though the unity he argued for was for those of different social classes who had been baptized into Christ.

Current communion services are often celebrated in the presence of adherents who are not baptized, but who still long to feel that they belong. What would Paul recommend for us? Would he consider our unbaptized adherents as insiders or outsiders? That is hard to know, but it is not hard to presume that he would exhort us to respect each other, to proclaim Christ's death and resurrection, and to remember that Jesus is the host of the communion table.

In the Corinthian church, the communion service was clearly connected to a full meal of shared food, for Paul admonished them by saying, "One person goes hungry

while another gets drunk (11:21).²⁹ This biblical text might be deliberately linked to a shared church meal. What would happen if the more solemn distribution of bread and wine or grape juice happened at the beginning or end of a church potluck meal in which all are fed?

Meals of Recognition

Luke 24:30-31 (Supper in Emmaus); Luke 35, John 21:1-14 (Last meal with the risen Jesus).

Shared meals provided a context for recognizing Jesus after his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, and on the shores of Galilee.³⁰

In John 21, a huge catch of fish prompts the disciples to recognize the risen Jesus. Jesus' beloved disciple recognizes him and tells Peter, "It is the Lord!" Peter responds immediately, leaving the others to haul the full nets to shore. The charcoal fire and breakfast invitation awaiting him on that shore are reminiscent of the scene where he had denied Jesus earlier, and they trigger healing of that painful memory. After-breakfast conversation offers Peter the opportunity to reaffirm his love for Jesus, and provides a model for Christians in all eras to do the same.

The large haul of fish reminds us of Jesus' earlier miracle of feeding the 5000 (John 6:1-11), and of God's abundant grace and mercy. It also symbolizes the church's mission as "fishers of people." "Jesus draws all (12:32), and many come." This last recorded meal of the risen Jesus with his disciples has much potential for our communion services.

Archaeological recovery of third century art in Turkey, Croatia, and the Roman catacombs suggests that this meal, which called them to deeper love of Jesus, was an important part of their communion practice and led to the development of the Love Feast tradition.³²

In the Emmaus Story, the questioning stranger caused the disciples' "hearts to burn within them." He offered questions and invited them to share the story of Jesus' passion, and then expounded on the teachings of the prophets. However, it was in the act of giving thanks for the bread, and breaking and offering it to them, that they recognized Jesus as the stranger. The exchanging roles of teacher/learner, guest/host in this story are delightful and instructive for our relationships with each other, with guests, and with Christ.

Taking the theme for a communion service from one of these texts would lend itself to a service which includes faith stories from participants whose experiences opened their eyes to Christ's unexpected presence.

Many communion tables have opened from the hope that participating in the ritualized breaking of communion bread will open the eyes of the unbaptized to recognize Jesus as their host. Archaeological research reveals that these biblical meals of recognition were part of the early Christian's communion services.³³ Do the related texts have a place at ours?

A communion service that responds to these texts could take place as a breakfast or evening meal in the Easter season. Imagine a congregation that has gathered for a culturally traditional breakfast on Easter morning. Familiar aromas welcome all ages as they arrive. Participants sing and pray, and hear one of these stories again, perhaps in a dramatic dialogue. And then they hear Jesus' invitation, "Come, and have breakfast." While they are eating, or afterwards in worship, the dramatic dialogue could continue with the repeated question, "Do you love me?" The question invites participants toward forgiveness and blessing for ministry, no matter the level of faith maturity.

Similarly, the Emmaus story could be acted out before an early evening meal that begins with communion. Bryan Moyer Suderman's musical rendition of the story, "On the Emmaus Road" 34 could be sung and acted out by all ages. As the meal begins, envision Jesus speaking a traditional prayer of thanks and breaking bread. Imagine his disciples distributing bread to all who have gathered. Stories of "How our hearts burned within us" might follow the meal, thus inviting others to experience this positive "heart burn."

God's Nourishing Miracles

Exodus 16: 1-36 (Bread and quails from Heaven); Exodus 17:1-7 (Water from the rock); Deut. 8 (Divine providence in wilderness and plenty in Canaan, an exhortation to remain faithful in times of plenty); 2 Kings 4:42-44 (Elisha multiplies 20 barley loaves to feed 100 people); Matthew 14: 31-21, Mark 6: 32-44, Luke 9: 10-17, and John 6: 1-15 (Feeding of the 5000); Matthew 15:32-39, Mark 8: 1-10 (Feeding of 4000); John 2: 1-12, (Wedding at Cana); Luke 5:1-11 (Miraculous fish catch and call to be "fishers of people"); John 21:1-14 (Jesus fills the disciples' fish nets).

These texts, while not commonly used as communion texts, demonstrate God's gracious provision and invitation. They help set the stage for fully inclusive communion services, some with a call to discipleship. In John's symbol-rich gospel, these texts, along with the dipping of the bread for Judas in John 13, provide the only descriptions of Jesus offering wine and bread. Note that the crowds in John 2 and 6 experience the miracle of the feeding on one level, while the disciples who stay around for deeper teaching recognize these signs and believe in him. In John 6 they benefit from the challenging discourse on eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood. Might these examples help us find ways toward table hospitality that don't erode deeper recovenanting?

Including one of these texts for reflection in a communion service could emphasize the way Jesus reaches out to people where they are, and could set the stage for a communion service that does the same. They might be suitable for church retreats or church picnic settings. Because they include a variety of foods, the service could again incorporate a full meal and the traditional elements of blessed bread and wine or juice alongside biblical storytelling about the selected miracle.

Heavenly Foretastes

Isaiah 25: 6-10a (Banquet vision), John 2: 1-12 (Wedding at Cana), Revelation 19: 6-9 (Marriage Supper of the Lamb).

Many of the above-mentioned texts have allusions to God's anticipated heavenly banquet, a potentially unique aspect to our practice of communion. Isaiah anticipates an elaborate feast where food is shared abundantly with all peoples who have need. Jesus builds on Isaiah's anticipation by providing an abundance of wine when inaugurating his ministry in John's gospel. John, the Revelator, then reconnects with Isaiah's longing when he refers to the marriage supper of the Lamb with the church as the bride of Christ.³⁵ These texts inspire responses of hope and delight as we claim God's blessing. They offer words of motivation and blessing appropriate for use at any of the tables where Jesus is host, and help us manage the tension of living into God's reign, "on earth as it is in heaven."

The Love Feast tradition of the Early Church provides us with good examples of what this combination of banquet and communion service could look like. Lisa Obirek recently researched the Love Feast tradition of the Early Church and built her wedding service around it. She writes: "An *agape* feast was the primary form of worship for Christians in the first four centuries . . . [I]t is, quite simply . . . a public banquet that celebrates the gifts of Jesus the Messiah and enacts the mutual love that Christians practice. The vast diversity of participants in *agape* feasts was the biggest difference between them and other banquets of the time. Women, men, slaves, masters, Jews, gentiles, rich, and poor—people who would normally never dine together—were united around the table in an *agape* feast. An important aspect of *agape* feasts is that they were potlucks, for which most participants contributed They also sent portions to the sick, absent, and imprisoned members, making it a hub for helping community members." 36

These Love Feasts were signs of God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. They promoted joy-filled anticipation and reorientation to God's reign. Whenever we look forward to the heavenly banquet in our communion services, we link into this tradition of living toward the day when such justice and fellowship will be the norm.

Anticipating the heavenly banquet may well be the most joy-filled aspect of communion. As the presence of the risen Christ among us is celebrated through

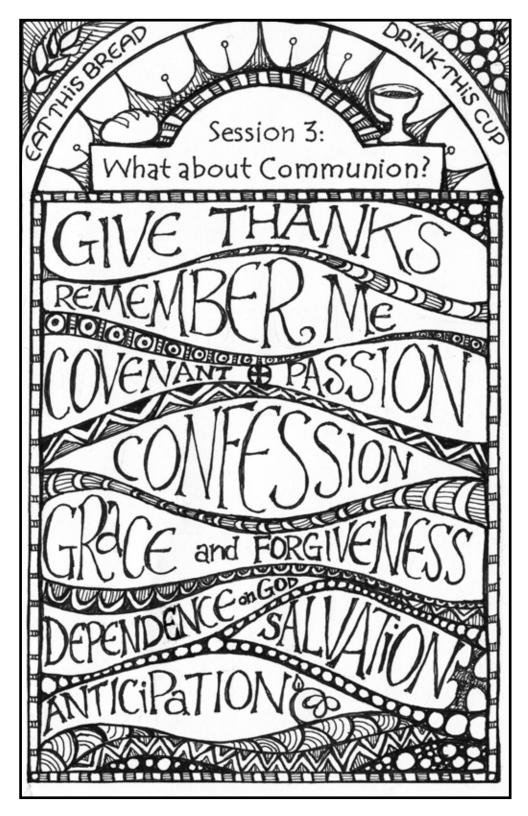
the Holy Spirit and through leaders who preside as hosts in his name, we anticipate his return. We look forward to a joy-filled reunion with those who have already died in "the feast of the redeemed in the age to come." ³⁷ At that feast, our questions about Christ's welcome to his table will be answered. For now, we try to live faithfully in anticipation of that celebration.

Another important aspect of this communion theme is its connection with those who have gone before us and whom we long to see again at the heavenly banquet. What would such a communion service look like? The theme begs for stories from our ancestors, from the early church, and for songs and prayers that anticipate being reunited with the "cloud of witnesses" as well as with our Lord and Saviour. If it were set in the context of a banquet, it could link us to the early church by including culturally appropriate food.³⁸

What do these different meals offer to the young and unbaptized? They offer opportunities for inclusion in the story and in the rituals. They offer rich opportunities for connecting with the bigger arc of God's redemption story and for localized testimony of God's ongoing revelation. They nurture the whole person, body and soul. They offer a rich variety of ways to extend Jesus' invitations to follow him, and they do so with deep roots in the biblical story. This can protect us from chasing novelty and remaining rooted in biblical rituals or actions.

Let's talk

- 1. In the New Testament, Jesus is often presented as fulfilling the promise of meal stories from the Hebrew Scriptures. What new understandings of communion did you receive by setting communion into these varied meal contexts?
- 2. Imagine what a communion service with a specific emphasis on each of these themes would look like in your congregation.
- 3. How does each of these meals form and inform what we believe about grace, the church, and mission?
- 4. How important is consistent format and content to the meaningful celebration of communion?
- 5. What shape and flavour might a communion service take if it acknowledged the many tables at which Jesus is host?
- 6. How could celebrating these meals help us engage those who are economically and racially diverse from our congregational make-up?
- 7. How can we engage in a creative interplay between our foundational communion instructions in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26, and the accounts of these other meals?



Session 3: What about the Church and Communion?

- Confession of Faith Statement
- Considering Broader Invitations
- Challenges and defences of traditional practice
- Let's Talk

Confession of Faith Statement

Let's begin by examining what we discerned about communion for the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.*

Article 12: The Lord's Supper. We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign by which the church thankfully remembers the new covenant which Jesus established by his death. In this communion meal, the members of the church renew our covenant with God and with each other. As one body, we participate in the life of Jesus Christ given for the redemption of humankind. Thus we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Lord's Supper points to Jesus Christ, whose body was given for us, and whose shed blood established the new covenant. In sharing the bread and cup, each believer remembers the death of Jesus and God's act of deliverance in raising Jesus from the dead. As we relive this event with a common meal, we give thanks for all God's acts of deliverance in the past and present, for the forgiveness of sins, and for God's continuing grace in our lives.

The supper represents the presence of the risen Christ in the church. As we partake of the communion of the bread and cup, the gathered body of believers shares in the body and blood of Christ and recognizes again that its life is sustained by Christ, the bread of life.

Remembering how Jesus laid down his life for his friends, we, his followers, recommit ourselves to the way of the cross. Confessing our sins to one another and receiving forgiveness, we are to come as one body to the table of the Lord. There we renew our baptismal covenant with God and with each other and recognize our unity with all believers everywhere in all times.

All are invited to the Lord's table who have been baptized into the community of faith, are living at peace with God and with their brothers and sisters in the faith, and are willing to be accountable in their congregation. ³⁹

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in this manner, the church looks forward in joy and hope to the feast of the redeemed with Christ in the age to come.

The essential actions within Mennonite communion practice as described in the *Confession of Faith* can be summarized as follows: returning thanks, remembering Christ's sacrifice, renewing our covenant, reliving his passion, confessing our sin, receiving grace and forgiveness, recognizing our dependence on Christ, retelling the Salvation story, and anticipating a redeemed reunion.

Considering broader invitations

Mennonites are developing new practical theologies of communion, but in most cases they have remained informal and unpublished. My 2007 Master's Thesis on the topic "Mennonites, Children, and Communion" included the following theology of communion, which emerged from dialogue with Anabaptist documents and current Mennonite leaders:

- Jesus is the host who calls us, but will not coerce us, to receive God's grace and thankfully remember Christ's life, death, and resurrection at his table.
- Jesus meets, equips, and sends all who welcome him, wherever they are on the journey of faith, at the communion table.
- Jesus' broken body and shed blood are signified in the elements we receive at his table. His suffering continues in our own brokenness and that of the church.
- Christ's work of reconciliation is also with us in the church as we join together at his table and are strengthened to participate in God's work.
- Christ invites believers, and the Holy Spirit equips them to renew their covenants with God and the church. The responsibility of weighing the participants' hearts rests in God's hand.
- Christ invites and welcomes faith novices to participate as novices, receiving the blessing of God and God's people, and giving their thanks and love to God and God's church through alternative elements.⁴⁰

Invitation to the Communion Table

The following invitation to the table embodies the above theology and remains true to the *Confession of Faith*: 41

On the night Jesus died

Dear children of God, our dance with God begins in the mists of time.

God loves us and has a place for us, wherever we are on the journey of faith.

Jesus still welcomes and blesses children.

Jesus still welcomes and engages those with honest questions.

Jesus still challenges and equips us to take up our crosses and follow him with joy.

So come to the table that has been prepared.

Come with your love, questions, and commitment.

All who are on the journey of faith,

who look forward to the time when they will be ready for baptism,

come and receive the blessings of our Lord's table.

Know God loves you, welcomes your love, and is with you

as you eat the pretzel and savour the grape.

Know that this church, a part of the body of Christ, welcomes you, loves you, and needs you.

All who have entered the covenant of baptism,

who have freely chosen Jesus and his church as the center of their lives, come, remember, and renew that covenant.

Eat the bread and drink the wine of the new covenant,

Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the many signs of the kingdom of God among us,

and to lead you into ever greater participation in that kingdom.

Remember, renew, and be renewed.

Let us all partake in this feast with thankful hearts. 42

Litany for Communion

Significant use of Don Penner's 2010 World Communion service might also provide a clue to how Mennonite communion practice is evolving. This "Special Sunday service" holds the record of being Mennonite Church Canada's most popular downloadable communion resource, ever. 43 Could its litany, which follows, be one reason for its popularity? Note its tone of humble confession and possible inclusivity:

Leader: Dear God, You invite us to come and eat at this table that has been prepared for us—food and drink; reminders of nourishment and the blessing of fellowship.

People: You bid us come, but our feet are heavy, our spirits hesitant. Who all will be there? Some who've criticized us? Others we've passed judgment on?

Voice 1: How awkward, even unnerving, to celebrate unity within the diversity of Christian faith when it seems so superficial.

Voice 2: How do you, Lord, see past our inflated senses of superiority, and the doubts we have in each other's integrity and beliefs?

Voice 1: How is it you ask us in when our arms are full of grudges and complaints?

Leader: Jesus said: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke13:24).

Voice 2: You want us to let it all go — to leave behind all our "right" answers and the "right" we have to sue those who have sinned against us. That's asking a lot.

People: Lord, with the faith that we have, as little as it may be, toss our deeply rooted prejudices and fellowship-killing stereotypes aside, that we may come into your banquet through the narrow door, and be at peace with all whom you have drawn in

Leader: Bless this bread and drink, and let it inspire us to imitate Jesus' choice to lay down everything, even his life, to hold your love and welcome out to all.⁴⁴

Tom Yoder Neufeld, one of Mennonite Church Canada's respected defenders of the traditional communion practice of restricting participation to baptized believers, concludes his essay, "The Lord's Supper: Party or Solemn Ritual?" by describing the potluck as a love feast, an event of pure grace, even a holy sacrament.

And then he writes: "Our eating and drinking together needs to respond to these two quite different and essential needs: the occasion to exercise Jesus' own

generosity and the occasion to be tested on our fidelity to that generosity and its sometimes costly exercise. We need both experiences equally. Perhaps we need more than one holy ritual of eating and dining together." ⁴⁵ Yoder Neufeld's idea of claiming the potluck as a holy ritual is important and leans in the direction of celebrating many tables.

Challenges and defences of traditional practice

The church's experience tugs at the traditionally closed door of communion. The *Confession of Faith* article on the Lord's Supper makes no mention of unbaptized adults within a congregation and yet, as the factors in "Impacts of change on our practice" in Session 1 indicate, the question of unbaptized adults is becoming increasingly common within our congregations.

These factors, in summary, are the greater frequency of communion, communion as part of Sunday morning worship as well as in more varied settings, less rigorous preparation of participants, our society's extension of adolescence, the increased prevalence of unbaptized youth and young adults, and of people from other denominations in our worship. For instance, a 1997 Conference of Mennonites in Canada survey reported that 52% of our congregations opened their communion table to unbaptized adults, and 23% did the same for unbaptized youth and children. As Rationale for doing so was not included in the survey. If more recent data on this topic were available, what might it report?

In 2001, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*⁴⁷ addressed the topic of communion with seven scholarly essays, two of which addressed communion issues relating to children. One sought a place of radical inclusion at the table for the church's children, affirmed child faith and the importance of learning and worshipping with children. The other strove to retain the connections between baptism and communion and an ecclesiology of "the church as the visible body of those committed to Messiah Jesus." It encouraged teaching children to wait willingly as they grew into a fuller understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. It also warned of the danger of letting things "go fuzzy."

In 2004, the magazine dedicated an issue to the topic of our changing communion practice. They interviewed congregations from across Canada who were re-examining their communion rituals. Many offered alternative elements and/or blessings to unbaptized children and youth, and others included them fully in the practice.

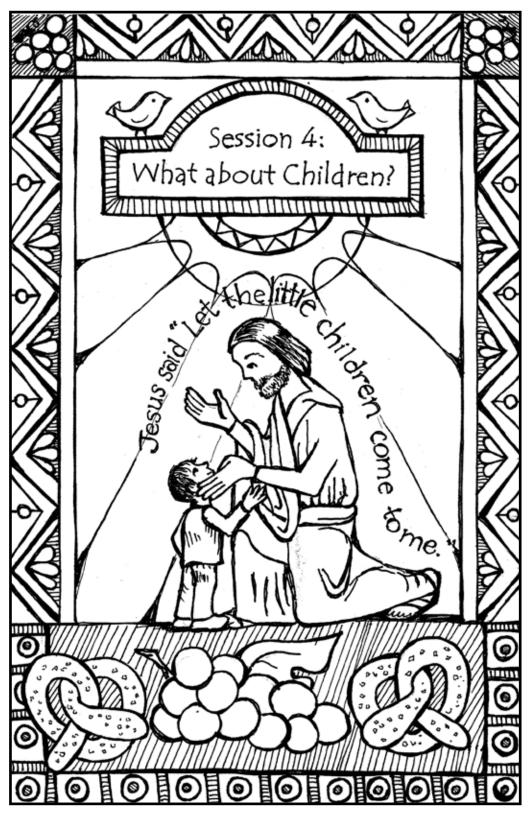
In 2008, the magazine paired John Rempel's essay upholding a communion for baptized believers only with an essay of mine, advocating a communion practice that invites unbaptized participants to receive blessings and alternative elements such as grapes and a pretzel.

At our National Assembly communion services, it has become common to invite children and other unbaptized participants to come forward to receive a blessing and alternatives to bread and wine, such as grapes, or grapes and crackers. No unhappiness with this approach from our congregations has been reported to date.

Let's talk

- 1. Which statements in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* in 1995 endure and speak constructively into our current communion practice?
- 2. How closely does your congregation's communion practice reflect the reported survey results? What are your reasons for the levels of openness in your congregation's "Invitation to the Table"?
- 3. What aspects of the communion theology described here stretch and expand upon, or clash with, what is articulated in the *Confession of Faith*?
- 4. Where does your congregation's theology of communion stretch and expand upon, or clash with, the one articulated in the *Confession of Faith*?
- 5. In what ways do the newer Mennonite communion litany and invitation, included in this session, challenge or expand what we believe and practise about communion?
- 6. What do you notice about the articles on communion in the *Canadian Mennonite*?
- 7. What does our current practice imply about our beliefs about grace, the church, and mission?





Session 4: What about Children?

- Responding to our Environment
- The Church and Children
- Understanding Children Spiritually
- Let's Talk

Responding to our Environment

The ways we think about children and childhood have shifted significantly over the last generation. Many aspects endure, but our descriptions of children have become more nuanced. They indicate our culture's more challenging and demanding engagement with children.

Bonnie Miller McLemore, one of the most respected writers in the field of child theology, a field that was just emerging when the *Confession of Faith* was released, writes: "Today, children are as much about difficulty, admiration, trouble, and tension as they are about celebration, admiration, and passionate attachment. This confronts adults with many more challenges as well as many more pleasures than any idea of childhood has done before. . . . Those who thought of children as innocent didn't have to take them as seriously as thinkers, doers, companions. Now we must. What is required now is not just a shift in our understanding of children. Rather, we must consider how our new regard for their complexity is expressed as we practise our faith within the daily rounds of family and congregational life. Children are active agents and participants in the practices of faith, even if they bring their own perspectives, capacities, and insights. Now we must figure out what this means for our lives." 49

In an effort to figure out what this means for our communion practice, this session will present brief but relevant guidelines for faith and practice in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, ⁵⁰ and highlight representative work in the areas of communion and children since the document's acceptance in 1995.

The church and children

Let's begin by examining what we discerned about children for the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.*

Article 19 excerpts: Children are of great importance. Jesus saw them as examples of how to receive the reign of God. Children are to be loved, disciplined, taught, and respected in the home and in the church. Children are also to honour their parents, obeying them in the Lord. Younger people are to respect their elders in the home and the church.

Article 11 excerpts: In the New Testament, baptism follows a person's faith. Baptism therefore is for those who are ready to enter a faithful relationship with Christ and the church. . . . It should be public because baptism means a commitment to membership and service in a particular congregation. Thus, water baptism is to be reserved for those old enough to make such a pledge. Infants and children have no need for baptism, since they are safe in the care of God. When they are able to be accountable for their own actions, they are able to make the church's faith their own. . . . Christian baptism is for those who confess their sins, repent, accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and commit themselves to follow Christ in obedience as members of his body, both giving and receiving care and counsel in the church. Baptism is for those who are of the age of accountability and who freely request baptism on the basis of their response to lesus Christ in faith 51

Understanding Children Spiritually:

The most serious recent and published work on what we believe about children comes from the developers of Sunday School Curriculum, who have been influenced strongly by practical theologians, such as Bonny Miller McLemore. Fairly broad binational discernment among leaders from Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Church USA, and The Church of the Brethren, was engaged in to produce and then revise the Theological Foundations Document for *Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News (2006)* and *Shine: Living in God's Light (2014)* respectively.

Here are three particularly convincing excerpts from the document:

- 1. The biblical story teaches us that before we are conscious of God, we are known by God, who loves us and invites us into relationship. As we are transformed by God's reconciling love and grace, we are led to respond
- 2. Jesus taught that becoming "as a child" is key to entering the kingdom of God. Children's imagination, sense of mystery, creativity, and boldness inspire Christ's church today. Children are gifts from God and they play an integral role in a vibrant church. They are part of the church today, not just adults-intraining
- 3. Jesus also showed that children are to be welcomed and blessed. Children, though first of all innocent and vulnerable, have potential for both goodness and wrongdoing Together, young and old shine the light of Christ in the world around us. ⁵²

There is a significant shift in the tone of these comments—from children receiving love, respect, and instruction *from* us, to children learning, worshiping, and serving together *with* us.

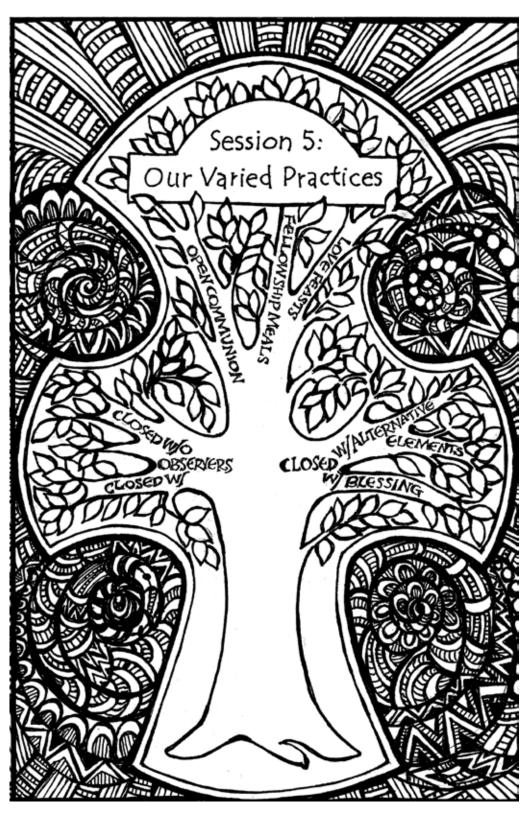
How can we live into this shift of attitude without welcoming and blessing children and their faith at the communion table? On the other hand, as C. Arnold Snyder contends, "If we tug at the strands of the Lord's Supper, lots of other strands become undone as well." ⁵³

This dilemma not only relates to children, but also to youth and young adults. We live in an era where questions are considered more important than answers, where virtual community competes with community life in our homes and congregations. Consequently, how children, youth, and young adults understand their faith journey and readiness for baptism also tugs at our understanding of communion.

Let's Talk

- 1. Which statements about children, made in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* in 1995, endure and speak helpfully into our current understanding of children and their place at the church's communion tables?
- 2. At what age are children or youth in our society able to discern between good and evil and make a knowing, responsible choice?
- 3. How would your articulation of what your congregation believes about children and unbaptized youth align with the statements made in this session?
- 4. In what ways do the newer theological statements about children expand the place we accord children and their child faith in the body of Christ?
- 5. What does it mean when we say children are part of the church now? Are they part of the body of Christ, the family of God, or what? What are the implications of this for our communion and baptismal practice?





Session 5: Varied Practices

- Main Emphases.
- Open or Closed Spectrum
- The Spectrum and Communion's Essential Actions
- Living Faithfully with Diversity
- Let's Talk

Main Emphases

No single communion service can respond to all of the purposes toward which Christ would have us work. After all, Jesus also broke bread in a variety of ways with his first disciples. We can indeed remember him well by celebrating more of the many kinds of tables he hosted.

As we try to be more intentional about our invitations to the Lord's Table, biblical texts related to communion can instruct us. We can also benefit from understanding which texts stress certain essential actions.

Traditional Objectives drawn from our *Confession of Faith* may be more completely achieved in services that are restricted to mature and committed followers of Jesus.

These *Essential Actions* include: Return Thanks, remembering Christ's sacrifice (Re-Enact Passion), Confessing Sins, Receive Forgiveness, Receive Grace, Renew Covenant, recognizing our dependence on Christ, Retelling the Salvation Story, and Anticipating Redeemed Reunion.

Emerging Objectives. But living as we do in the unique culture of 21st century North America, other communion actions beg to be considered as essential, actions such as: Affirming the Whole life-long Faith Journey, Extending Christ's Hospitality, forming faith by Living Into the Biblical Story, Extending Christ's Invitation To Others (the young and uncommitted). Noel Moules, church planter in the U.K.'s Anabaptist network believes the future of the church will take place in intergenerational settings around meals at tables.⁵⁴

Hopefully, celebrating the many tables of Jesus can help us live well into the future, whether or not it unfolds as Moules predicts.

Just as a great variety of biblical texts and church year occasions set the stage for communion services, varied levels of inclusiveness and exclusiveness have become common in communion practice.

Open or Closed Spectrum

Closed behind closed doors. Such a service allows participants to focus on their relationship with Christ and each other without distractions. This kind of communion service can help participants renew their commitment to faithfulness and their participation in God's redemptive action.

Renewed faith should help baptized participants reach out toward others with faith stories and hospitality. Unbaptized people within the community may also derive some benefit from wondering about the mysterious ritual in which the baptized are engaged.

Closed in the open. Held during a worship service this kind of communion service needs to deal with potential distractions from the young and unbaptized. The service of recovenanting has the potential benefit of offering a living testimony. All participants benefit from retelling stories related to the communion service and can participate in songs and prayers. This may prompt faith-forming conversations.

Closed with blessings. Held during a worship service, this approach includes the benefits listed in the previous point, but it also invites the young and unbaptized to participate in actions of blessing. Those blessings let them know that God and the church love and welcome them, and anticipate the day when they will join them as baptized members.

Closed with alternative elements. Young and unbaptized adherents are invited to receive alternative elements such as grapes or juice and crackers or pretzels as well as a blessing. They participate in the actions of communion that let them know God and the church love them, welcome them, and anticipate the day when they will join them as baptized members. They experience Jesus feeding them and honouring their place on the journey of faith.

Open communion. Anyone with a desire to participate at Jesus' table is free to do so. Participating in this ritual of remembrance will hopefully inspire greater faith and commitment, in the sense of Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." However, the opportunity of witnessing to the public renewal of baptismal commitments is lost, unless another action for renewing church membership and baptismal vows is built into the service.

Love feasts and fellowship meals. All are welcome to participate in a full meal. In the case of a formal Love feast, stories and prayers connect the meal to celebrating Jesus and explicitly act out the mutual love that Christians practise. Liturgies and prayers accompany each course of the meal. ⁵⁵ In the case of fellowship meals, liturgies and prayers may also be included. These meals are generally more informal and the message is implicit in the hospitality that is extended.

Comparing the Spectrum with Communion's Essential Actions

Traditional Objectives

		Essential Actions							
		Return Thanks	Re-Enact Passion	Confess Sins	Receive Forgiveness	Receive Grace	Renew Covenant	Retell Salvation Story	Anticipating Redeemed Reunion
ine spectrum	Closed behind closed doors	Y	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Y	Υ	Υ
	Closed in the open	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Y / N	Υ	Υ
	Closed with blessings	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Y / N	Υ	Υ
	Closed with alternative elements	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Y / N	Υ	Υ
	Open communion	Υ	Y	Υ	Υ	Υ	N / N	Υ	Υ
	Love feasts and fellowship meals	Υ	N	N	N	Υ	N	Υ	Υ

Emerging Objectives

		Essential Actions					
		Affirming Whole Faith Journey	Extending Christ's Hospitality	Living Into Biblical Story	Extending Christ's Invitation To Others		
	Closed behind closed doors	N	N	Υ	N		
trum	Closed in the open	Υ	N	Υ	Υ		
The Spectrum	Closed with blessings	Υ	N	Υ	Υ		
	Closed with alternative elements	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
	Open communion	Y	Υ	Y	Υ		
	Love feasts and fellowship meals	Y	Y	Y	Y/N		

Leg	end	for	both	charts

Y means More Likely N means Less Likely

I separates those who receive communion and those who don't

Increasing levels of inclusivity have an impact on how effectively the essential actions of communion are carried out. In the *Traditional Objectives* chart, it appears that covenant renewal is challenged as openness increases. In the fellowship meal, for example, the informality of the event makes it more challenging to convey Essential Actions. However, the *Emerging Objectives* chart presents quite a different focus and outcome. It is clear that other objectives are positively affected, such as affirming and blessing the whole life-long journey of faith, extending Christ's hospitality, forming faith by living into the biblical story, inviting the young and the uncommitted to respond to Christ's invitation to live in him.

We have not denominationally discerned whether these are additional essential elements for communion practice or competing ones. They are the "essential actions" expressed by our practice as we wade through the waters of post-Christendom and open up our communion tables. What other "essential actions" motivate your congregation's communion practices as those waters swirl around your feet?

These charts represent some of the tensions between traditional and current practices and communion emphases. The second chart could be adapted to articulate each congregation's communion-related desires and challenges. Integrating current communion challenges with traditional values and practices is essential for living into this era where church adherents are more scattered, and have more options for community and inspiration. Helping adherents who are not yet baptized develop a sense of belonging is important to the church's mission and worship life.

Living Faithfully in Diversity

In order to live alongside varying and evolving practices, we must seek ways of faithful living in the midst of diversity. At the denominational level, Mennonites in Canada are developing discernment skills to help us live with conflict in healthy ways.

The document Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love: Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement⁵⁶ is one result of that process. It reminds us to go to the other in a spirit of humility, to be quick to listen and slow to judge—and to be willing to negotiate. It encourages us to be steadfast in love, open to mediation and to trust community discernment. In short, it reminds us to be the body of Christ. This is great advice for reflecting on how to best serve and receive the body of Christ, broken for us, at the communion table.

But sometimes we need specific processes, as well as guiding principles to help us hear each other. Eleanor Kreider describes such an approach in *Communion Shapes Character.*⁵⁷ In this approach, a group facilitator invites participants to take their places on an imaginary line representing the spectrum of views on communion participation. After taking their places along the line, they cluster and

confer in affinity groups, so they can present that view. This is followed by guided conversation between the groups. The facilitator insures conditions that allow people to respectfully and directly ask questions of those with whom they disagree on this matter. The discussion is recorded and kept for reference purposes. Participants generally come away from the exercise with greater respect for diversity and the ability to view the topic from new angles.

While such a process can help build respect and broaden perspectives, it is not designed to implement a change. This following story, shared by Ilene Bergen, one of the pastors at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont, illustrates a similar process but includes steps that move toward implementing a change in practice.

Steinmann Mennonite Church entered a four-week "Crucial Conversations" process with Betty Pries, the Executive Director, consultant and coach of Anabaptists Resourcing the Church (ARC) ministries. Pries helped them to deal creatively, as Jesus would, with areas of disagreement. She helped them consider and name all sides of a given topic, both the strengths and the traps by placing contrasting views and attitudes onto quadrants, thereby presenting the topic's complexity visually. They discussed how to speak the truth in love with each other, and how to tap into the strengths of both silence and conversation when dealing with a complex situation.

One discussion topic was communion, which led to additional conversations and the introduction of some time-limited experimental changes in their communion practices. This included circulating a "Call to the Table" document in advance of the communion services during the period of testing these changes. All who responded affirmatively to that Call to the Table (see Appendix 1) were invited to participate in communion. This decision was based as much in the desire to include adults who were new to the congregation, often returners to church after many years away. They wondered about how to include them—often baptized as infants or not at all but with some church background.

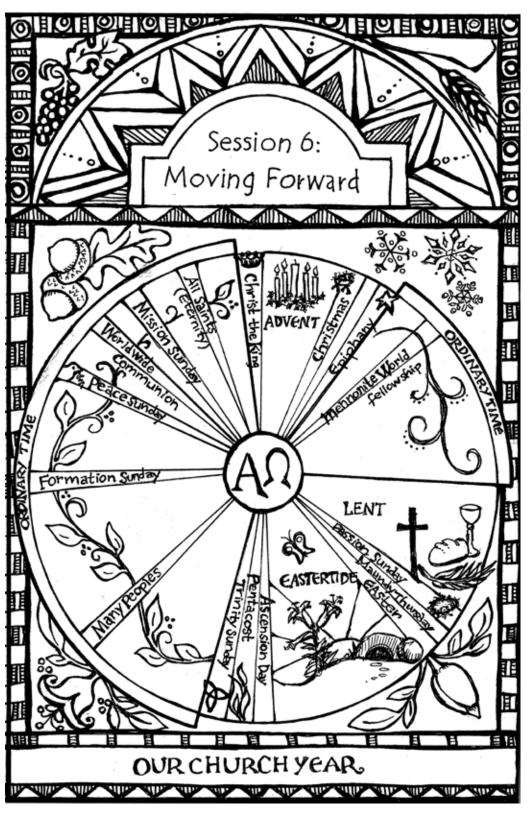
Was the journey toward baptism compromised in any way by serving communion to the unbaptized? Bergen responded: "I think it's a good question and believe unbaptized adult participation in communion presents an opportunity for us to at least raise the question of baptism with them. However, we have been more interested in being welcoming and being missional. Many believe we somehow need to be more inclusive in communion."

Bergen says their "Call to the Table" statement gives parents a chance to discuss communion with their children and makes long-term church attendees review their commitment. "... In the interim, we have no clear link between baptism and participating in communion. This is definitely a work in process."

Steinmann Mennonite Church will review their decisions about communion practice through continued discernment in 2015. Their story illustrates a strong and guided process which encourages people to hear and think about the benefits and shortcomings of different perspectives of communion, deciding to try a new model for a while, and committing to ongoing discernment. More models and discernment resources are listed in Appendix B.

Let's Talk

- 1. Where does your current communion practice fit on the Open/Closed Spectrum? How would you describe its impact on the young unbaptized parts in your church family?
- 2. What essential actions of communion do you think are present or missing in your current communion practice? Feel free to name actions that reflect what you believe about grace, the church, and mission.
- 3. Discuss whether the two charts are competitive or complementary. What other emphases would you include?
- 4. How could the processes described above help your congregation process a change in practice where there are differing perspectives?
- 5. How could such processes help your congregation move toward a more widely-owned, understood, and intentional communion practice?
- 6. What other processes might help your congregation live in healthier conflict?
- 7. What is you congregational ratio of baptized to unbaptized adults?
- 8. Why and how might participating in communion before baptism impact a person's journey toward baptism?



Session 6: Moving Forward

- Jesus' Hospitality and Challenge
- Learning from some Spiritual Cousins
- Dilemmas Presented by Extended Adolescence
- Reasons for Expanding Communion to Celebrate Jesus' other Tables
- A Church Year of Expanded Communion Tables

Jesus' Hospitality and Challenge

One essential criteria of communion is that we recognize Jesus as the host and strive to represent both his hospitality and his challenge as we serve at this special table. If we aren't responding to Jesus with this meal, it may be a wonderful event, but it's not Christian communion.

Some congregations are exploring the many tables where Jesus served as host and using the related texts to affirm child faith, to bless the larger faith journey, to live into the biblical story, to extend hospitality, and to be missional.

Eleanor Kreider encourages us to create a community of many tables by building elements of communion into eight North American cultural meal traditions. These table traditions could grow alongside our regular communion services, eventually enriching and renewing the ordinance while also enriching our lives of worship and fellowship:

- Offering a communion service of thanksgiving (a communion action that includes all) before serving a meal to the hungry.
- Breaking bread and sharing a cup along with prayers of thanks and intersession during a meal with guests in our homes.
- Sharing words of gratitude and blessing with each other during coffee mornings at church.
- Expressing thanks for God's love and sharing it during snack time at Parents' Group events with the parents and their children.
- Acknowledging Jesus as host and giving thanks for his spirit of generosity and hospitality at picnics.
- Culminating a role-played Bible study of an Epistle with an Agape meal.
- Inviting a friendship group for monthly Saturday breakfasts that link with Jesus' invitation to have breakfast in John 21:12.
- Acting out the feeding of the 5000 as part of a summer, open air program. 59

In a similar vein, Tom Yoder Neufeld recommended adding Eucharistic elements to our potlucks as a way of including those who are not yet baptized in Jesus' table hospitality.⁶⁰ But, even with this encouragement, implementing such diverse practice is challenging, especially as we honour the ordinance of communion and strive toward unity in Christ within and beyond God's great and diverse church.

Eleanor Kreider captures this challenge eloquently and wisely: "The unity making work of the Spirit sometimes seems mad, hopeless, and impossible. But if we give space to the Spirit on this matter, and if we become willing to try out some new ideas, miracles beyond our imaginings can happen...The very nature of Eucharist as a meal and as a storytelling event in which Jesus is remembered makes it the most flexible and accessible form. The focus is on Jesus, his fascinating activities, his wonderful stories, his provocative teachings, his comforting and grace filled presence....The unexpected and uncontrollable aspect of our Eucharistic worship is that Christ meets us there. If we are open to the Spirit, our encounter with the God of Jesus changes and shapes us, personally, and as a community. If we are willing to prayerfully risk evaluating and reshaping our Eucharistic worship, we will find the Spirit in the middle of it, showing us the way." 61

Learning from Spiritual Cousins

As we seek direction from God's Spirit in terms of our communion practice, the reflections of another believer's church in this matter might be helpful. For the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the question of communion has been live for some time, especially as they engaged in post-modern church planting.

They produced a six-session study booklet, *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion*, ⁶² with an introduction that wisely states, "This booklet . . . does not set out to provide the Baptist position' but we do believe there is a valid Baptist perspective to which we can contribute. Its aim is to open up discussion so that local churches may make informed decisions on the nature of communion and the place of the child in the church's worship, fellowship and mission. It seeks to explore how children might be welcomed to this central celebration of our faith with integrity, taking seriously the nature of the meal."

Without being prescriptive, the Baptist booklet shows how to make a place for children⁶³ as full participants in communion. It does so by highlighting Jesus' refusal to construct fences around fellowship at his tables. By describing the encounter of Jesus and Zacchaeus, the booklet stresses that "repentance is the response to grace and fellowship rather than a necessary condition for it to happen." ⁶⁴ Jesus' challenge to repentance and change is acknowledged by Baptists as central to his ministry, but covenant renewal is not emphasized in their understanding of communion.

Another glimpse into communion practice of our British Baptist cousins is provided again by Eleanor Kreider, who lived among them for many years as the Anabaptist Network was being formed. She describes a Baptist congregation emerging in that

time which practiced Eucharist in the context of small group intergenerational meals. She comments that it seemed wrong to them to deny children the communion elements of bread and juice. This led them to consider the status of children in church life, and they decided to consider children as full members until those same children determined otherwise. Children played a full part in church life, appropriate to their age, and participated freely in communion until they became adolescents, when they generally refrained from taking communion until they were ready to make an independent decision for baptism.⁶⁵

Dilemmas Presented by Extended Adolescence

Kreider's example describes a shift in attitude toward children and engagement with them as they grow into adolescents. This shift has also been expressed by Mennonite pastors who have a long practice of either offering children alternative elements, or serving them the actual communion elements. Accepting this shift as natural and temporary honours child faith and acknowledges children as part of the body of Christ. It also respects the adolescent's need to critically assess individual faith as a good and natural part of the journey. However, this appreciation for youth grows complicated when we consider the effects of extended adolescence in recent years.

As noted in Session 1, adolescence is becoming more firmly entrenched as an extended time for self-discovery, exploration, and education, rather than a time to settle into a stable community. Social pressure makes it more difficult and even counter-cultural for adolescents to feel like they belong to our congregational communities or to make baptismal commitments. How can we best continue to welcome them in our worship life?

After all, when adults accept Jesus' hospitality and challenge, their dependants invariably reap the blessings and the responsibilities of that choice. This is good and right, and helps us commit to building the counter-cultural, redeeming, multigenerational community called church. One of those blessings is appropriate table fellowship with Jesus. And, as youth individuate from their parents, they also individuate from the faith of their parents so that they can arrive at a faith they personally own, one that fits their emerging adult identity. Characteristics of this extended adolescence need to be studied alongside of our beliefs about baptism.⁶⁶

Reasons for Expanding Communion to Celebrate Jesus' other Tables

In response to these factors and the importance of covenant renewal as part of communion, can we find ways to more deliberately celebrate the other meals in which Jesus is host?

Mennonite theology and ecclesiology have many similarities to those of some of our Baptist cousins, especially as we strive to be faithful in our post-modern context and

seek new ways of being church. One possible difference, though, is that Mennonites seem to place greater emphasis on covenant renewal during communion than the U.K. Baptists do. As renewing our baptismal covenant to "simply follow Jesus" becomes increasingly counter-cultural, it becomes even more important to do so. The challenge going forward is also to welcome and acknowledge the faith journeys of those who are not yet baptized. It's helpful to remember that the initiating, and most faithful partner, in covenant is our Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. "By his blood shed for us, Christ inaugurated the new covenant."

As we live in these waters of uncertainty, the need for familiar words and actions is universal. So is our common need, whether baptized or not, to have table fellowship with Jesus. Regularly celebrating the many tables that Jesus hosted provides a way forward. Since the church year shapes much of our congregational worship life, why not also use it to celebrate Jesus' many tables of hospitality?

A Church Year of Expanded Communion Tables

The following list of potential communion tables includes more suggestions than one congregation could integrate into their practice, so each congregation will need to discern which suggestions best suit them. The list includes all of Mennonite Church Canada's designated Special Sundays and several intergenerational Holy Week options.

If you are considering an increase in the variety and frequency of communion services, think big, but act small. By implementing this vision in small increments, it will be sustainable and palatable for all. It is important for our faith formation to meaningfully relive familiar words and actions. The new practices we adopt need time and opportunity to become familiar.

Each of these Jesus-hosted meals contains deep riches of meaning and possibility for spiritual encounter. These additional meals expect that biblical words of institution from the Gospels or Paul's letter to the Corinthians will remain, but they provide inspiration for what and how words are said at the communion table. We need to keep remembering the night where Jesus was betrayed and offered us a new covenant. None of us, no matter how mature we are, will ever "plumb the depths of meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection." 68

First Advent. A Passover-focused communion service would help begin the new church year as a whole intergenerational community. This may seem unusual, since we usually connect Passover with Jesus' passion. However, Passover is part of the Jewish New Year, when they celebrate God's use of the first Passover to usher in the Israelite's freedom from bondage to Pharaoh. Advent ushers in our new church year, even as it ushers in God's reign, on earth as it is in heaven. Traditional Passover foods include the foods of shepherds (lamb or goat) and farmers (unleavened bread), and could shape the menu. Children could ask questions about why we start the

church year on First Advent, why we wait for Jesus, how we can respond like Mary, and why God chose to come to us as an infant in a troubled part of the world.

Mennonite World Fellowship Sunday. A communion service could celebrate this broad fellowship with a focus on Meals of Recognition and Heavenly Foretastes. A multi-cultural potluck would be appropriate. While the liturgy could be quite similar to the instructions in 1 Cor. 11:23-26, the meditation and words of invitation would focus on God's big family, and the way God surprises us with new insight. Worship music could be varied to celebrate our solidarity with the world-wide Mennonite Communion.

Lent. As we wander with Jesus into a Lenten wilderness fasting from some of our regular fare, we could celebrate an intergenerational communion that focuses on God's nourishing miracles. It might include opportunities to make family fasting covenants. Suggestions for this and other Lenten spiritual practices are given in the Lent At-Home booklet series.⁶⁹

Passion Sunday. Luke's Last Supper account could help us prepare for the tumult of emotions that are part of the Passion Week. Consider the foot-washing and agape meal observed by Bridgefolk,⁷⁰ a movement of Mennonites and Roman Catholics who celebrate each other's traditions. This could take place in an intergenerational context and set the stage for living into the drama of Passion Week. Since this service is ecumenically sensitive, it could even be celebrated with another congregation in your neighbourhood.

Maundy Thursday. A traditional member's only service would be appropriate here, including an articulation of covenant renewal and reconciliation. Alternatively, some congregations and some families in our congregations celebrate a Christian Seder on Holy Thursday,⁷¹ or participate in a Jewish Seder as an interfaith event. Many understand Maundy Thursday as a "New Passover." Some congregations add a footwashing service to the Maundy Thursday service in response to Jesus' instructions in John 13. This can also be done in a family setting.⁷²

Easter. Imagine a celebrative intergenerational meal and communion service with culturally appropriate Easter foods. Worship texts would focus on Jesus' resurrection appearances (especially John 21:12) and the anticipation of eating again with him in a heavenly banquet. The breakfast fare and whether or not to use alternative foods for those who are not yet baptized would depend on the congregation.

Ascension Day communion. Perhaps a focus on Luke 24 and the Emmaus disciples could shape this intergenerational event. Whether or not to use alternative elements would depend on the congregation. This church festival is almost forgotten, but a Sunday Communion service or a midweek Love Feast could anchor it back in our collective consciousness.

Many People's Sunday. This celebration lends itself well to a focus on heavenly foretastes.⁷³ Since children and youth often have more cross-cultural experiences than their parents, it might be an important communion to celebrate with a wide-open invitation. It would also be appropriate to celebrate this service with a sister congregation from another people group.

Pentecost. As the earliest recorded communion text, Paul's instructions to the Corinthians could help the congregation identify with the early church. The setting could emulate Greek communal feasts of that era. Potluck foods in addition to communion elements would be appropriate. Congregational interpretation of who attended that Corinthian meal would shape whether unbaptized believers would participate fully, or with alternative elements.

Formation Sunday/Ordinary time. When we go back to school, work, and church engagements in September, it would be good to focus on God's nourishing miracles to help all ages tackle the busyness of fall. Since children and youth encounter some of the biggest challenges during this season, and since Jesus fed the multitudes in these texts, this communion service would ideally be open to all.

World Communion Sunday. This celebration is similar to World Fellowship Sunday, but with a focus on our unity in Christ beyond denominational boundaries. John 17, Jesus' high priestly prayer, provides appropriate thematic content. Best worked out in collaboration with a neighbouring church of another denomination, developing this service would depend on the Table practices of both denominations. In some cases, an Agape meal without communion elements, that anticipates fuller communion, might be most appropriate.

Peace Sunday. This Sunday lends itself to a second focus on covenant celebration and renewal—like Maundy Thursday, above—since the new covenant is a covenant of peace. However, it would be important to renew covenants in the presence of all, since teaching Jesus' way of peace is invitational and especially necessary in the midst of its increasingly counter-cultural appearance. It could culminate in offering a meal to the hungry in your neighbourhood or engaging in some form of active peacemaking.

Mission Sunday. This Sunday lends itself to a focus on the Corinthians' communion, where walls of separation were overcome through Paul's missionary activity. Again, celebrating this service with the whole community provides important opportunities for teaching and testimony.

Memorial or Christ the King Sunday. This service might focus on the cloud of witnesses and anticipate a reunion of the redeemed. It provides a great opportunity to tell our stories of faith, for remembering those who have died in faith, and for

articulating our desire to be in communion with them. These stories shape our identity so the young and unbaptized need to experience this celebration together with the local sages and storytellers, whether they receive alternative elements or not. The more extended setting of a Love Feast could facilitate additional storytelling, and could introduce food practices of former eras more easily.

Let's talk

- 1. What other criteria are important for the way your congregation celebrates communion?
- 2. How important is it that communion have one consistent practice and biblical focus?
- 3. What is lost and gained by celebrating communion with a variety of texts?
- 4. If you needed to decide on one practice and one biblical focus, what would it be?
- 5. Which Sundays of the Church year provide the best opportunities for you to begin to expand your communion celebrations to include some of Jesus' other tables?
- 6. Many of these suggestions are linked to full meals. What are the possible benefits and drawbacks for our communion practice to be linked to potlucks and/ or love feasts?



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I thank them all for encouraging me and keeping me grounded in congregational realities and our faith heritage. Through them I have heard of congregations who are currently trying to find their way through these issues, which also inspired me to press on to completion.

I also thank my patient pastor, John Braun, who reflected on matters of communion with me as I struggled to articulate the fire in my belly about this topic, and who encouraged my exploration of Jesus' many tables. And finally I thank my dear husband and life partner, Peter, whose analytical skills dwarf my own, but who never stopped encouraging me to make this project as helpful as possible for the church we both love and serve.

The graphic designer, Joanna Pinkerton, offered her artistic skills as a gift to the wider church after being referred to me by a common friend. Though we have only met electronically, bonds have grown between us as she internalized my writing and produced a breath-taking cover design and illustrations that invite the user to delve more meditatively into the subject matter at hand. What a blessing!

And then there were those who helped polish and bring this project to life with great editing, copy editing, proof reading, and formatting. Editorial assistance from Deborah Froese again helped organize and articulate my randomly creative work so that it communicates clearly. Careful proofreading by Lois Bergen caught little errors that escaped others' eyes. Arlyn Friesen Epp provided great help in getting the links right.

Dan Dyck's senior editorial work and Ryan Roth Bartel's technological magic combined all the different bits into a beautiful downloadable booklet! Being part of a team with complementary gifts is both humbling and inspiring.

And yes, thank you to each of you who take this booklet and use it in your congregational journeys and faith practices. May Jesus and the Holy Spirit guide you to expressions of faithful communion at the table of our Lord, and may we all grow into his likeness as we respond to his hospitality.

Appendix A

When Steinmann Mennonite Church began including children and the un-baptized in communion, pastors shared copies of this call to the table with families and others who were not yet baptized but wished to participate in communion. If these children and unbaptized adults could affirm it, they were welcome to participate:

Before I take the body of the Lord

Before I take the body of the Lord, before I share his life in bread and wine, I recognize the sorry things within: these I lay down.

The words of hope I often failed to give, the prayers of kindness buried in my pride, the signs of care I argued out of sight: these I lay down.

The narrowness of vision and of mind, the need for others to serve my will, and every word and silence meant to hurt: these I lay down.

Of those around in whom I meet my Lord, I ask their pardon and I grant them mine, that every contradiction to Christ's peace might be laid down.

Lord Jesus Christ, I empty now my heart and stretch my hands, and ask you here in bread and wine which you lay down. Amen.

"Before I Take the Body of the Lord" text by John L. Bell

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Appendix B

Because engaging the conversation about communion practice is difficult, you may want to access additional resources to guide congregational discernment processes. The following materials are available on the internet, and for loan or download through CommonWord¹ through the links provided:

AMBS faculty, "AMBS Resources for Conversations about Sexuality." *AMBS*. www.commonword.ca/go/12 (Accessed December 9, 2014.)

Bechtel, Ken. "Difficult Conversations." Workshop outline downloadable from www.commonword.ca/go/5

Dreidger, June Mears, managing editor. "Crucial Conversations," *Leader: Equipping the Missional Congregation:* Fall 2012, Vol. 10 Issue No. 1. Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2012. www.commonword.ca/go/7

Mennonite Church Canada: Managing conflictual conversations: "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love." Downloadable handout from www.commonword.ca/go/6

Oswald, Roy M. and Johnson, Barry. *Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities.* Durham, NC: Alban Institute, 2009. www.commonword.ca/go/8

Rendle, Gilbert R. *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Difference*. Durham, NC: Alban Institute, 1999. www.commonword.ca/go/9

Schirch, Lisa and Campt, David. *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical, Hands-On Guide.* Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007. www.commonword.ca/go/10

For additional resources on this topic, see www.commonword.ca/go/11

¹ On January 5, 2015, the Resource Centre officially became CommonWord: Bookstore and Resource Centre, a new collaboration between Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University. Although the name and contact information has changed, all of current Resource Centre services and materials—for loan and download—remain available from www.commonword.ca and through the new physical location at 2299 Grant Avenue. This merger with CMU Bookstore expands opportunitities services to include retail products, extended hours of operation, and residence in a beautiful public venue. We look forward to continuing to serve you!

For Further Reading

The Baptist Union of Great Britain. *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion*. Oxfordshire, U.K.: Baptist House, 2010. <u>www.commonword.ca/go/22</u>

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Janzen, Waldemar. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Exodus*. Waterloo, Ont. and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000. <u>www.commonword.ca/go/25</u>

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Morgan, Alison. Summary, Stuart Murray: Church after Christendom. Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes Eng.: Paternoster Press, 2004. *Alisonmorgan*. www.alisonmorgan.co.U.K./Murray%2004.pdf. (Accessed November 8, 2014).

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Neufeld, Tom Yoder. "The Lord's Supper: Party or Solemn Ritual," *Naming the Sheep: Understanding Church Membership.* Winnipeg, MB: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1997. www.commonword.ca/go/21

Penner, Don. Worship Resources: World Communion Sunday, Oct 3, 2010. Winnipeg, Man.: Mennonite Church Canada, 2010. www.commonword.ca/go/32

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Rempel, Elsie H. R. *Mennonites, Children and Communion.* Winnipeg, Man.: University of Winnipeg, 2007. <u>www.commonword.ca/go/19</u>

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Roop, Eugene F. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Genesis.* Waterloo, Ont. and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987. <u>www.commonword.ca/go/26</u>

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Stutzman, Paul Fike. *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011. www.commonword.ca/qo/15

Suderman, Bryan Moyer. "On the Emmaus Road," downloadable from https://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/on-the-emmaus-road/id343492301?i=343492303

Suderman, Robert J. *Being a Faithful Church 1*, (Winnipeg, Mennonite Church Canada, 2009) www.commonword.ca/go/13

Swartley, Willard B. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: John.* Waterloo, Ont. and Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014. www.commonword.ca/go/27

Vision Series: A Journal for Church and Theology: Vol.2 No. 1 Communion, Spring 2001. Winnipeg, Man.: CMU and Elkhart, IN: AMBS, www.commonword.ca/go/17

Vision Series: A Journal for Church and Theology Vol. 12, No. 2, Baptism into Christian Vocation, Fall 2011. Winnipeg, Man.: CMU and Elkhart, IN: AMBS. www.commonword.ca/qo/34

Endnotes

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- 4 Ibid, 71.
- 5 Ibid, 79.
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- 9 One of the questions Mennonite Church Canada's Future Directions Task Force is leading congregational discernment on is whether we can be unified even when we disagree about major issues such as sexual orientation.
- 10 Alison Morgan, Summary, *Stuart Murray: Church after Christendom* (Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes Eng.: Paternoster Press, 2004), Nov 08, page 1. www.alisonmorgan.co.U.K./Murray%2004.pdf (Accessed December 12, 2014).
- 11 Eleanor Kreider, *Communion Shapes Character* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 176. www.commonword.ca/go/18
- 12 The lack of clarity in the invitation at the 2004 Assembly disturbed me and prompted me to focus my thesis on *Mennonites, Children and Communion*. www.commonword.ca/go/19
- 13 Carrie Martens, Minister at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener ON, email correspondence with Elsie Rempel, May 31, 2014.

- 14 Royden Loewen and Steve Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace: a Global Mennonite History* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press and Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012), 267. www.commonword.ca/go/20
- 15 Resources Commission, *Naming the Sheep: Understanding Church Membership* (Winnipeg, Man.: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1997), 103. www.commonword.ca/go/21
- 16 John D. Rempel, 225. <u>www.commonword.ca/go/16</u>
- 17 Royden Loewen and Steve Nolt, 271.
- 18 Carrie Martens, Minister at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener ON, email correspondence with Elsie Rempel, May 31, 2014
- 19 At our National Assembly Communion services this is often recognized by having Scripture read in many languages and serving bread from many cultures. And, invitations to this particular Communion table have become more inclusive, offering a blessing and alternate elements to those who are not yet baptized.
- 20 Faith and Unity Department, The Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion* (Oxfordshire, U.K.: Baptist House, 2010). www.commonword.ca/go/22
- 21 Noel Moules, *Fingerprints of Fire, Footprints of Peace: A Spiritual Manifesto from a Jesus Perspective* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: John Hunt Publishing, 2012). Moules writes: "More and more people are discovering the creative and provocative possibilities of the Peacemeal, this subversive celebration that feeds Jesus to the world, feeding the hungry, sharing food with our enemies, eating in a way that is gentle with animals and wild nature, anticipating the messianic banquet."176. www.commonword.ca/go/23 Also see the video of Noel Moules' presentation, "What Does it Mean to Follow Jesus" at www.commonword.ca/go/24 (Accessed December 12, 2014.)
- 22 Waldemar Janzen, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Exodus* (Waterloo, Ont. and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000) 172. www.commonword.ca/go/25
- 23 Ibid, 171.
- 24 Eugene F. Roop. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Waterloo, Ont. and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 177-180. www.commonword.ca/go/26
- 25 Eleanor Kreider and Rachel Miller Jacobs, AMBS Pastors Week, 2006, workshop notes.
- 26 The information in this section is largely gleaned from the draft of Dan Nighswander's upcoming *Believers Church Bible Commentary* on 1 Corinthians. Dan invited me to respond to this section of his commentary project.

- 27 An example of these early church records is the 2nd century *Didache*, or *Teachings of the Church Fathers*, a translation of which is available at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html (Accessed December 12, 2014.)
- 28 Paul Fike Stutzman, 7-29.
- 29 Ibid, 37.
- 30 Willard Swartley, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: John* (Waterloo, Ont. and Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 480-482. www.commonword.ca/go/27
- 31 Ibid. 482.
- 32 Paul Fike Stutzman, 85-86. Rita Haltman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), also makes this point, basing her comments on R. Lee Cole, *Love Feasts: A History of the Christian Agape* (London: Charles Kelly, 1916), 61-63. She writes "The name for these communal meals may have developed from the meal the risen Jesus had with seven of his disciples on the shore of Lake Tiberias (John 21:1-24) . . . [because]the last meal centers on Peter's conversation with Jesus about love", 62-63. www.commonword.ca/go/28
- 33 Rita Haltman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, quoting Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archeological Evidence of Early Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 25. "This meal with bread and fish became the primary kinship or fellowship meal of the early church," 64.
- 34 Bryan Moyer Suderman, "On the Emmaus Road" (Small and Tall Music, 2002) https://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/on-the-emmaus-road/id343492301?i=343492303 (Accessed December 12, 2014.)
- 35 Through personal contacts I have learned that this text from Revelation is used in a communion service at weddings in Old Order Mennonite Communities. Perhaps this is one area where we could learn from them.
- 36 Paul Fike Stutzman, 72.
- 37 Confession of Faith, article 12, 51.
- 38 Lisa Obirek and Gerald Ens connected their wedding meal to the early church menu by making sure their food was locally accessed and organically grown.

 But one could also serve traditional middle-eastern food like flat breads, dates, fish, and so on.
- 39 Bolded emphasis is mine and highlights statements that are being challenged by emerging practice.

- 40 For a fuller explanation of communion theology written from within a Mennonite perspective, see Elsie H. R. Rempel, *Mennonites Children and Communion* (Winnipeg, Man.: *U of W, 2007).* 88-108 www.commonword.ca/go/19
- 41 Elsie Rempel, "Table Worship," in *Words for Worship 2* by Dianne Zaerr Brenneman, 115-121 (Scottdale, PA, Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2009), 121. www.commonword.ca/go/30
- 42 Elsie Rempel, "Invitation to the Communion Table" (Winnipeg, Man.: Mennonite Church Canada). www.commonword.ca/go/31
- 43 As of August 21, 2014, this resource had been downloaded 7529 times, which is more than twice as many for others in this series.
- 44 Don Penner. Worship Resources: World Communion Sunday, Oct 3, 2010 (Winnipeg, Man.: Mennonite Church Canada, 2010). www.commonword.ca/go/32
- 45 Tom Yoder Neufeld, "The Lord's Supper: Party or Solemn Ritual," *Naming the Sheep: Understanding Church Membership* (Winnipeg, Man.: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1997) 71-80, 80. www.commonword.ca/go/21
- 46 Robert J. Suderman, ed. *Naming the Sheep: Understanding Church Membership* (Winnipeg, MB, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1997), 102. www.commonword.ca/go/21
- 47 Mary M. Schertz and Gordon Zerbe, ed. *Vision, A Journal for Church and Theology: Communion, Spring 2001, Vol.2, No.1.* (Elkhart IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, AMBS, and Winnipeg, Man.: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Canadian Mennonite University, 2001). www.commonword.ca/go/17
- 48 Gordon Zerbe, "Children and the Jesus Supper: Some anecdotal and theological reflections," in *Vision: A Journal for church and Theology, Vol.2 No. 1* (Elkhart, IN: AMBS and Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC, 2001), 93. www.commonword.ca/go/17
- 49 Bonnie Miller McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007) 64- 65. www.commonword.ca/go/33
- 50 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1995) www.commonword.ca/go/14
- 51 Bold emphasis is mine.
- 52 https://shinecurriculum.com/about/foundational-documents. Shine: Living in God's Light, (Elgin, IL, Brethren Press, and MennoMedia, Harrisonburg, VA, 2014.

- 53 C. Arnold Snyder, "The Lord's Supper in the Mennonite Tradition," in *Naming the Sheep: Understanding Church Membership* (Winnipeg, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, MB, 1997), 79-87, 86. www.commonword.ca/go/21
- 54 Video presentation by Noel Moules www.commonword.ca/go/24
- 55 Mary Schertz of AMBS and Abbot John Klassen, OSB, of St John's Abbey, developed a foot-washing and Agape meal liturgy for Bridgefolk, a gathering of liturgically minded Mennonites and peace-minded Catholics, who can't have full communion with each other for doctrinal reasons. I have participated in this Love Feast and found it inspiring and faith forming, and include it here as an example of sharing Jesus' table hospitality within existing restrictions. www.commonword.ca/go/4
- 56 Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love: Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement (Winnipeg, Man.: Mennonite Church Canada, 2012). www.commonword.ca/go/6
- 57 Eleanor Kreider, *Communion Shapes Character* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 183. www.commonword.ca/go/18
- 58 Betty Pries is the Executive Director, consultant and coach of ARC (Anabaptists Resourcing the Church ministries), in Ontario. This group offers a fee-for-service ministry to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations.
- 59 Kreider, 190 195.
- 60 Tom Yoder Neufeld, 80.
- 61 Kreider, 182.
- 62 The Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion* (Oxfordshire, U.K. Baptist House, 2010), 8. www.commonword.ca/go/22
- 63 The writers of this booklet refuse to engage the discussion of where childhood ends.
- 64 Ibid. 8.
- 65 Kreider 185-186.
- 66 Irma Fast Dueck's article, "It's only water" *Vision Series: A Journal for Church and Theology Vol. 12 Baptism into Christian Vocation, Issue 2 Fall 2011, 21-27*, highlights the reasons many of today's young adults struggle with the need for baptism. Mary Schertz's, "Love and Power," 13-20, in the same issue, presents a complementary theology of baptism set in the context of vocational discernment. www.commonword.ca/go/34
- 67 Confession of Faith, Article 8: Salvation. www.commonword.ca/go/14

- 68 *Gathering around the Table: Children and Communion*, 28. www.commonword.ca/go/22
- 69 Elsie Rempel, At-Home Lent Resource Series, (Winnipeg, Man., Mennonite Church Canada, 2002 present). <u>www.commonword.ca/go/35</u>
- 70 Mary Schertz and Abbot John Klassen, OSB, Bridgefolk Agape Meal and Footwashing Liturgy, (Winnipeg, Man, Mennonite church Canada, 2014), www.commonword.ca/go/4
- 71 Women for Faith and Family, *A Christian Seder for Holy Thursday*, (St. Louis, MO, Women for Faith and Family, 1999 present). www.commonword.ca/go/36 (Accessed December 12, 2014.)
- 72 Elsie Rempel, Lent At-Home series (Winnipeg, Man., Mennonite Church Canada, 2002 to present) devotional booklets recommend this service to help children understand and participate in the events of Holy week. www.commonword.ca/qo/35.
- 73 Jorge Hoajaca, "Many Peoples Sunday," (Winnipeg, Man.: Mennonite Church Canada, 2013). www.commonword.ca/go/37

Commendations:

Once again, Elsie demonstrates deep respect and care for children and their faith development, and for viewing appropriate age-level rituals and traditions as essential in the life of our congregations. I applaud the use of theological statements, biblical texts and the varied practices of communion. All this diversity is real, and is evidenced in practices across a wide spectrum. Elsie is a champion of thinking theologically about such things, and the church is blessed to receive her gifts. This excellent work will be very useful in both Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

— Marlene Bogard, Minister of Christian Formation, Resource Library Director, Western District Conference, Mennonite Church USA

I love this daring booklet which tackles things so engrained in our traditions! I especially appreciated the chapter on children and that it engages current challenges of baptism for youth and young adults. The chapter on moving forward is provocative and challenging. I look forward to the substantive conversations it will promote. So I applaud Elsie's daring and effort in working at this important task!

— Chris Lenshyn, Associate Pastor, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, BC.

Thank you so much, Elsie, for all your hard work on this. This is a vital issue in the church and it so often feels like we are all over the place and need to sit down and consider why we celebrate communion and what is important to us.

— Joanne De Jong, lay leader, Holyrood Mennonite Church, Edmonton, Alta.

This booklet is a very good way to place ideas about how we practice communion on the table for people to think about. I like its ideas of adding communion to the other tables our congregations serve at. It is good for us to discern together about communion so that we do not limit God's love and grace through our own judgements.

— Kyung Hee Park, lay leader, Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

I think it will be helpful to have this available. I'm looking forward to the finished version to use in a study with our deacons. Thanks for offering it. I'm glad you address the important issue of living with difference. This booklet could even be a tangible example of a "Third Way" in the midst of diversity.

— Dan Nighswander, Pastor, Jubilee Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

WOW, a lot of work has gone into this. I appreciate your personal approach and your questions at the end of each chapter.

— Ilene Bergen, Pastor of Christian Formation, Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

A welcome, thought provoking, and informative read!

— Sian Hancock, Award Leader, Institute for Children Youth & Mission, Bristol Baptist, U.K., member of the Anabaptist Network U.K.



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