



New Testament

# Images of the Church

*A worship resource celebrating the potential of the Church*



*New Testament images of the church: A worship resource celebrating the potential of the church*  
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# Foreword

## Images of the Church

The church in Canada is under attack, an assault characterized not by coherent, well-orchestrated strategies from the “wolves” outside, but by the silent, yet concerted, desertions from the pasture by the “sheep” inside. Recent studies show that about 83% of Canadians define themselves as “Christian,” but only about 22% (and dropping) see themselves connected to the church. In other words, over 60% of Canadian “Christians” are “church-less.” This data points to a Christian rebellion against the church. The result of this rebellion is the rapid growth of “church-less Christianity” in our nation.

Talk of “church-less Christianity” seems illogical if not abhorrent to Mennonite ears. Is Christianity without accountable body-life still Christianity? Is it not the disciplined community that serves as God’s agent of transformation in our world? Is spiritual discernment not better done in community than individually?

The document in your hands celebrates the potential of the church as taught by New Testament writers. We are pleased to make this resource available to you. Small groups have worked diligently to understand images used in the Bible and to suggest ways in which the intentions of these images might be taught and lived out in our congregations. This study does not exhaust the possibilities of understanding the church. There are at least sixty additional images used by New Testament writers that can continue to deepen our understanding of the nature and the responsibility of the church in our world. We commend further investigation to all worship leaders, pastors, and persons concerned with communicating the meaning of being “church” to our people.

We have identified the “authors” behind each of the images presented. We have done minimal editing of what we received. You will appreciate the flavour and the aroma of the many dedicated but different groups at work in our church. I wish to thank the many people who have given of their time and shared their creativity with others. We will all be richer because of your work. It was exciting to receive phone calls asking for deadline extensions, not because people weren’t working, but because they were. “Our group is so excited about what we’re finding that we want to spend a few more meetings on this. Could we have a few more weeks?” Your group might wish to work at another image for a second edition of this resource.

We understand the church to be an integral part of the message of Christ. With this resource we call on our congregations:

- to understand the creative possibilities of being the church
- to teach these possibilities to our members and our children
- to find relevant ways of moving from possibility to responsibility
- and, to celebrate the call we have received to be God’s people.

*A vine without a branch and a branch without a vine are both less than they are meant to be.*

Robert J. Suderman  
Executive Secretary  
Resources Commission  
Conference of Mennonites in Canada



# 1. The Church: Salt of the Earth

Matthew 5:13

*This study was prepared by  
Hope Mennonite Fellowship  
North Battleford, Saskatchewan*

## A. Biblical Study

### Primary Biblical texts

- Matthew 5:13 (13-15), the Sermon on the Mount
- Luke 14:34-35, the cost of full commitment to Christ in a life of service, the parable of the feast, vv. 16-24
- 1 Samuel 2:22-36, Eli loses his saltiness and the consequences

### Other texts

- Colossians 4:6, our speech should be tempered
- Mark 9:49-50, Church must be permeated with preserving power
- 11 Chron. 13:11, Davidic covenant referred to as covenant of salt
- Leviticus 2:13, offerings and covenant

### What this image means

Jesus was speaking to the disciples and the Jewish multitude. The Jews knew salt was symbolic of covenants and for purposes of purification, self surrender to the Lord. It implied repelling all impurity and hypocrisy.

### Why this image was used

The church has the power and the responsibility to act as salt in preserving the Good News and upholding Biblical moral standards (righteous living). The Church must remain true and extend its influence beyond its immediate sphere or become worthless and be thrown out.

## B. Communicating in the congregation

### What our churches can learn

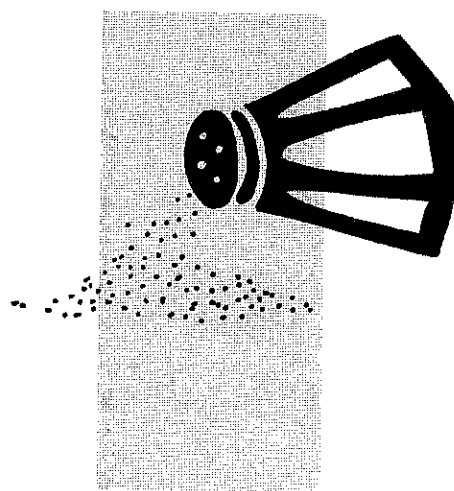
We must be vigilant and strive for purity within the Church and in our society. We must work for peace and justice, speaking against the rapidly declining moral standards ie. euthanasia, gambling, abortion. We must be aware that our failure to do so will render us useless.

### Use in a worship service

Mission Week—being salt implies sharing the Gospel of Christ, and the new lifestyle that involves, with others.

### A modern symbol

Salt is as useful today as in Jesus' time. We used a salt shaker as our symbol.



### In the congregations

#### Worship

Songs—as outlined in Service Outline

Symbolic Act—a sprinkling of salt as an act of recommitment to a vital Christian life

#### Sunday School

Children's Feature—different shaped salt shakers depicting church building designs or denominations. All filled with salt (each grain a Christian). To do any good the salt must be sprinkled out into the community and the world "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our Lord."

#### Mission education

Banner—a salt shaker sprinkling salt on the world (globe)  
Worship Centres pictures or objects depicting everything we have to offer a lost world ie, the Bible, spiritual gifts, a voice for the poor and oppressed, radiating from a central figure of our Lord.

### Service Outline

Gathering hymn: #396 The Works Thine, O Christ  
(Hymnal: A Worship Book)

Call to worship

Hymns: #418 Move in our midst, #6 Here in this place

Children's Feature: (see above Worship – Sunday School)

Reading: Being the Salt of the Earth (Anthology: Tym Elias) uses Scriptures: Matthew 5:13-16, James 2:14-18, Ephesians 22:8-10, Romans 15:1-3a, Philippians 2:1-5 & 12-13

Hymn: #226 You are salt for the earth

Message: The Church – Salt of the Earth

Closing Hymn: #423 May the Grace of Christ our Saviour

Benediction: May our gifts and our efforts and flavour to the work of your church, O God, as salt adds flavour to food, in order to fill others with life.



## 2. The Church: *Fish and fish net*

Luke 5:1-11; Mark 1:17; Matthew 4:19

*This study was prepared by  
Carman Mennonite Church  
Carman, Manitoba*

### **A. Biblical Study**

#### **Primary Biblical texts**

- Luke 5:1-11; Mark 1:17; Matthew 4:19
- The context is that of calling disciples. There is a miracle described in the catching of so many fish.

#### **Other texts**

- Matthew 13:47-50, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that caught all kinds of fish
- John 21:1-14, Jesus provides for the disciples; a miracle involving a large catch of fish

#### **What this image means**

- Fishing was a livelihood; a means of providing one with food – a necessity of life.
- Fishing was an intentional effort to catch fish.
- Fishing with a net was a common practice, a team effort.
- Fishing with a net is gentle; non-violent.
- The net is intended to keep the fish.
- Fishing is a process of searching and finding. You need to go where the fish are.
- Fish when the conditions are favourable for fishing.

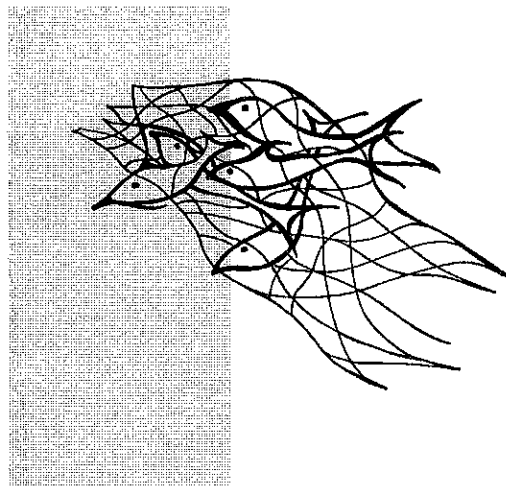
#### **Why this image was used**

- The call to the disciples was to switch from fishing for fish to fishing for people.
- The process of searching and finding fish is a natural analogy for the outreach effort of the church.
- The church, the caring community, is to gather in people in a gentle, non-violent way.
- The church needs to go where needy people are in order to reach them.
- Fishing for people is only effective as we rely on Jesus.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation**

#### **What our churches can learn**

- Outreach needs to be an intentional effort.
- Outreach needs to be a team (or community) effort.
- Whatever your occupation/vocation, you can use it for God.
- We all have different nets, i.e. gifts and talents.
- Unconditional acceptance of all people (fish) is called for.
- We need to rely on the Spirit of Jesus to aid us in our efforts to reach people.
- We need to go where the fishing is good – involve ourselves in the lives of non-believers.



#### **Use in a worship service**

This image fits most appropriately with a mission/outreach emphasis. The focus is on reaching people for Christ and discipling them within the Christian community.

#### **A modern symbol**

The internet: a method of reaching people; of sharing the message of God's love; of bringing awareness to people of the local church and the programs the church offers; of inviting people to join the church community by way of advertising etc.

#### **In the congregations**

##### **Worship**

Songs—I Will Make You Fishers of Men; Blest Be The Tie That Binds (the net is made up of several strings tied together).

Children's story about fishing; possible object lesson could include making a simple net with all the children. The LIFE banner: a symbol of a fish with the words Living in Faithful Evangelism.

##### **Sunday School**

Song—I Will Make You Fishers of Men

Practicing teamwork in accomplishing an objective e.g. the making of a net together on a field trip to a skid-row mission.

##### **Mission education**

Drama concerning the role of the church—are we a fishing society that simply talks a lot about fishing or do we actually get out where the needy people are and fish? Exposure to several mission agencies hearing actual experiences of evangelistic/mission work.

#### **Service Outline**

Singing (songs as suggested above in worship and other missions songs)

Scripture reading: Luke 5:1-11

Offering: to go to benevolent cause

Skit or dramatic reading on the church as a people with a mission – to fish

Sermon inviting/challenging people to get out and fish; recognizing the strength of the community (net) to do this together.



### 3. The Church:

# Unleavened Bread

Matthew 16:6, I Corinthians 5:7

*This study was prepared by  
Superb Mennonite Church  
Superb, Saskatchewan*

## A. Biblical Study

- Primary Biblical text
- Matthew 16:6
- I Corinthians 5:7
- We expanded these to include Matthew 16: 5-12 and I Corinthians 5:6-8.
- We also referred to Exodus 12 in our background study.

### Other texts

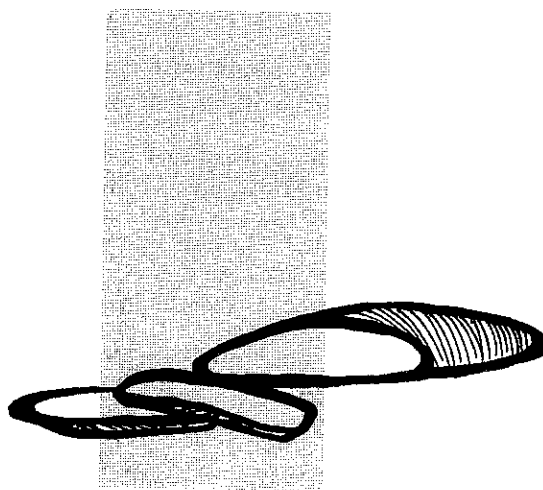
- Mark 8:14-21 is Mark's version of Matthew 16:5-12.
- Luke 12:1-3 speaks more explicitly about hypocrisy; of breaking the silence, or exposing false teachings and hidden evils.
- Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21, the parable of the yeast, teaches that a small amount of leaven (influence) can affect many. Galatians 5:9 follows a similar thought, and in verses 2-13 Paul states that those who follow the old Jewish legalism deny the new way of grace for which Christ died. He warns that this yeast – this evil influence – must be rooted out before it affects and ruins their whole religion.

### What this image means

- For the Jewish people - referral to "unleavened bread" would have been a strong reminder of the Passover in Egypt; of deliverance from slavery and death. Secondly, it would have been a reminder of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and other religious sacrifices. There the grain sacrifice was to be unleavened due to the association of leavening with fermentation and corruption. Therefore, to be unleavened was to be uncorrupt and holy, pure and set apart.
- For the Gentiles – since they would not have had the Jewish history and teachings on which to base their understanding, the gentile people were likely as confused as our group was when we first began this study.
- For the Corinthian church – it would have been symbolic of deliverance and of leaving sin and death behind. Paul teaches them that Jesus was the sacrificial unleavened bread. He was the holy and uncorrupted flesh given for the world. He was the prime example of sincerity and truth.

### Why this image was used

This image will have been used to talk about the church because of its connection with the Passover – a time of



remembering deliverance from slavery (to sin) and death. It will also have been used because it is a good analogy for that which works silently and insidiously while overtaking "the whole batch of dough" i.e. a little evil, though hidden or covered up, can affect the entire congregation.

## B. Communicating in the congregation

### What our churches can learn

As congregations today we can learn that we are responsible to address the spiritual ill-health within the church. We need to be aware, prepared, and careful, because evil and corruption can sneak up on us. We ourselves cannot be hypocritical (we must examine our hearts and be as clean on the inside as we are on the outside), but are to live in sincerity (in purity, with a pure conscience) and in truth. According to Romans 14, unacceptable behaviour must be dealt with, but dealt with compassionately and without arrogance. As we recognize that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), it is important to build up the whole body of Christ, so that we will be able to resist temptation. Most importantly, we are reminded that we are made pure only by the sacrifice of Jesus, our Paschal Lamb.

### Use in a worship service

An appropriate time to use the image of unleavened bread might be the Sunday before or the first Sunday of Lent. A festival of preparation would be a time to examine our hearts, confess our sins, and humbly ask to be made holy; a time of preparation and cleansing, a time of rededication – a new "feast of unleavened bread" for all.

### A modern symbol

Several modern-day equivalents to unleavened bread came to mind. One was cancer (used in "The Living Bible" in place of "yeast"), which grows and spreads, all the while unseen, and takes over before we know it is there. (It may need to be said that neither yeast nor cancer is inherently evil). For those who farm the land, another example of evil might be quackgrass, which, if not dealt with, will grow and spread. Deliberate weed control is the only effective measure in eliminating the spread of this weed which can choke out an otherwise healthy field of grain.



## ***In the congregations***

### **Worship**

Worship centre: a bowl of homemade yeast (see and smell) and a bowl rising yeast (set up during the time with children)

Bulletin cover/ banner: "to be as unleavened bread"

Hymns: suggest hymns which emphasize the holiness of God, hymns of confession and assurance, and the attached hymn suggestion: "O Lord, our God, we praise you today." (to the tune #568 HWB) - a song leader is helpful for this one. Close with a hymn of praise.

Symbolic act: invitation to all to share the unleavened bread (and juice).

### **Sunday School**

Show how leavening (yeast) works, with explanations that are age-appropriate

Bake the bread without leavening

Base stories on OT scripture as it was understood by the Israelite people (Exodus 12) and NT scripture as it pertained to the early church (Matthew 16:6 and I Corinthians 5:7)

- Discuss (again using age-appropriate questions) such things as:
- Is leavening present in the church today? What evidence of it do you see?
- What do you see as the role of "church discipline?" In what ways can persons in the church be accountable to each other?
- Do you see evidence of leaven in your own self? How do you deal with that and what can you do about it?

### **For Children**

Assuming it is not already being used during the worship service – using a story about a white lie that grows into a big fight on the playground, and discussing that. Or *Quarreling*, a book by Charlotte Zolotow, introducing the story with Galatians 5:9.

### **Mission Education**

The same concepts as above could be incorporated, with emphasis on taking the plank out of your own eye before attempting to remove the splinter from the eye of the other (Matthew 7:3-5). Emphasis would also have to be on understanding (as completely as possible) what is seen to be leaven, before condemning it as such. The good news is that Jesus is able to purge away the leavening (our sins) when they are acknowledged as such.

### **Service Outline**

The Festival of Preparation required an extra half hour, so we began our SS. Earlier to allow for the extra time.

#### **We Gather**

Call to Worship: (adapted from Psalm 99:9, 2-5; I Peter 1:13)

Leader: Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain.

People: for the Lord our God is holy.

Leader: Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool;

People: for the Lord our God is holy.

## ***Unleavened Bread (continued)***



Leader: The King is mighty, and loves justice; the King has established equity; in Jacob God has done what is just and right.

People: Exalt the Lord our God, for the Lord our God is holy.

Leader: Just as God who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

People: Therefore, let us examine our hearts before him, for God will bring to light the leavening within.

All: Let us prepare our minds for action; be self-controlled; and set our hope fully on the grace to be given us when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Opening Hymn: #120 (HWB) Holy, holy, holy

Announcements – joys and concerns – Prayer

Offering Hymn: #366 (HWB) God of grace and God of glory

Special number: (I Corinthians 13 was read – unplanned; yet most appropriate)

### **We Listen**

Time with the children:

Who likes bread? What is it made of?

Explanation of worship centre (understanding the origin, characteristics and effect of yeast)

Application story (*Quarreling* by Charlotte Zolotow)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:5-12; I Corinthians 5:6-8

Hymn: #580 (HWB) Help me to be holy

Meditation: "To be as unleavened bread"

Introduction – clarify negative connotations of "leavening" comparing with cancer cells, quackgrass. Review characteristics and effect of leavening.

Understanding the image – from a historical viewpoint, as it applied to the Israelites (include portions from Exodus 13), as it was understood by the disciples and the early church.

Application for the Church today – regarding church discipline (I Cor. 5:7a; Matt. 7:1-3). Note that Paul recommends expelling sinners from membership, but Jesus associated with sinners. Searching our own hearts (plank in eye – Matthew 7:3-5). Recognizing that we are "unleavened" only because of Christ's sacrifice (I Cor. 5:7b)

Closing summary

### **We Respond**

Hymn: O Lord, our God, we praise you today

Discussion: Is leavening present in the church today?

What evidence of leaven do you see? What do you see as the role of "church discipline?" In what ways can persons in the church be accountable to each other? Do you see evidence of leaven in your own self?



How do you deal with that?

Hymn of confession: #527 (HWB) Lord Jesus, think on me

Prayer – guided or silent, ending with the Lord's Prayer

Hymn of Assurance: #470 (HWB) Christ Jesus lay

Sharing the unleavened bread (piano music - #580

(HWB) Help me to be holy)

Closing Hymn: #102 (HWB) To God be the glory

Benediction: (adapted from I Thessalonians 5:23,24,28)

May our holy God himself, the God of peace,

Sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept pure and blameless

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

AMEN

### **O Lord, our God we praise you today**

*(words by Helen Olfert, tune MH #568 As lives the flower within the seed)*

1. O lord, our God, we praise you today

Our hearts are filled with love,

For in our everyday way of life,

Your grace is sufficient for me.

Sufficient for me, sufficient for me,

In everyday of our life,

Your grace is sufficient for me.

2. We ask to be as unleavened bread.

To be made clean and pure,

For as God's children we strive to live

In truth and sincerity.

In truth and sincerity, in truth and sincerity

As God's children we strive to live

In truth and sincerity.

3. Forgive the corruption, the sin and deceit

That enter our lives every day.

Help us to be ever steadfast and true

And bless our church we pray.

Ever steadfast and true,

Ever steadfast and true,

Help us to be ever steadfast and true,

And bless our church we pray.

### **Recipe for Unleavened Bread**

¼ cup. flour

¼ lb. butter

½ cup powdered sugar

½ cup milk

Mix together till like cornmeal. Add milk, and work until the dough cleans the bowl.

Roll on back of a cookie sheet. Mark off into strips and prick with a fork. Bake at 325 – 350 degrees for 20 minutes.

### **Homemade Yeast**

1 cup warm water

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp. each salt and sugar

1 medium raw potato, grated

Pour into 1 quart glass jar. Cover with cheesecloth. Place in warm spot for 24 hours. Stir and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Stir down daily. In 2 – 3 days the mixture will become foamy. Pour starter into a glass jar with a secure lid and store in refrigerator. In 3 or 4 days a clear liquid will collect on top of the mixture. It is now ready to use.

*(from Mennonite Foods and Folkways from South Russia, Vol. 1, pg. 78, by Norma Jost Voth)*



## 4. The Church: *Altar*

Hebrews 13:10; I Corinthians 9:13

*This study was prepared by  
Eigenheim Mennonite Church  
Rosthern, Saskatchewan*

### **A. Biblical Study** *Primary Biblical text*

- Hebrews 13:10
- I Corinthians 9:13

### *Other texts*

- I Corinthians 10:17 & 18, those who eat the sacrifices (priests) participate in the altar, just as we partake in the Lord's Supper (the body and blood of Christ) we also participate in the body of Christ. Paul is warning the Corinthians not to eat food that has been offered to demons because if they do, they will participate with demons (vs. 20, 21)
- Revelation 11:1, refers to the altar in the heavenly temple – doesn't seem to be used in the metaphorical sense.

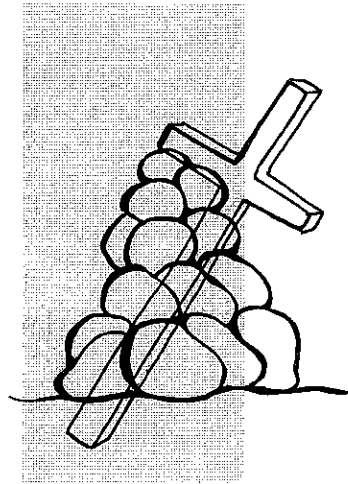
### *What this image means*

Hebrews 13:10 Several commentators identify the altar as the cross and the sacrifice as Jesus. The original recipients of the letter – Jewish Christians – would not have thought that the altar referred to them as a church, but would have recognized the altar as the cross on which Jesus was sacrificed for their sins (v. 12).

To identify with this image of the altar would be to share in the sufferings of Christ and to bravely face persecution "bearing the disgrace he bore" (v.13). Also, these same Jewish Christians would have been familiar with the regulated rituals of sacrifice that were part of Jewish worship.

It was common knowledge to them that priests were allowed to eat food that had been offered as sacrifice to the Lord. Yet here the author points out that these same priests, "those who minister at the tabernacle," do not have a right to eat as the Christians' altar, which is the cross of Christ.

According to another commentator, "Those who worship at the tent have ... no rights in the altar of the cross." The crucified Savior means nothing to them. The writer is pointing readers to the privilege Christians have and warning them against losing it." I Corinthians 9:13 also speaks of the right of priests, "those who serve at the altar" to eat food that has been sacrificed on the altar. Paul refers to himself, as an apostle, as one who "serves at the altar" through preaching the gospel.



As such, he is entitled to receive material support from the church for his efforts. But he has not used this right for fear that it might hinder the progress of the gospel. The Corinthian church would have understood the image of the altar to be the place where atonement was made for the people. The altar was not the people themselves.

### *Why this image was used*

To our understanding, this image is not used specifically to talk about the church, but rather, refers to the cross which, like the altar of the Old Testament, is a focal point for worship.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

The altar, in both Old and New Testaments, as a gathering place, a place of confession and a place of renewal. In the New Testament we see the altar and the cross in relationship to each other as simultaneously a gift and a call. The image carries with it the idea of commitment and accountability.

### *Use in a worship service*

We thought the image of the altar could be used effectively on a number of occasions. In particular, Lent brings with it a logical association with atonement and sacrifice that works well with the altar image. We also thought the image could be used nicely at Thanksgiving, focussing attention on Christ's sacrifice for us and our response.

### *A modern symbol*

We struggled with this question, but could think of no satisfactory modern-day equivalent for the altar image. Perhaps some solid teaching on the meaning of the altar in its historical (i.e. Old Testament) context would be the best way to bring the meaning of the image across.

### *In the congregations*

#### **Worship**

Hymns focussing on atonement, sacrifice

#146 (HWB) O Lamb of God

#254 (HWB) Ah, Holy Jesus

#524 (HWB) What mercy and divine compassion

Is Your All on the Altar of Sacrifice Laid? (unknown source)



Scripture suggestion: Psalm 51, Romans 12, our response to God.

### **Sunday School**

Teachings on the history of altars and sacrifices could be made meaningful with the construction of an altar, perhaps using stones, at the front of the sanctuary. The altar could later be used during worship as individuals bring forward their symbolic offerings of thanksgiving or atonement.

### **Mission Education**

The commitment of a missionary to serve Christ and the church in a given Setting is a sacrifice made willingly in response to Christ's work of atonement. Thus the altar image could be used in conjunction with a commissioning service. The Romans text suggested above would work well with this.

### **Service Outline**

#### **Thanksgiving Service**

Call to worship

#659 (HWB)

#12 (HWB) Come, let us all unite to sing

Hymn of Praise and Adoration (any or all three suggested below)

#99 (HWB) We praise thee, O God

#102 (HWB) To God be the glory

#150 (HWB) Wonderful grace of Jesus

#### **Confessing our sins**

Possible place for special music (instrumental)

Old Testament scripture: Psalm 51 (HWB #818 or #690)

Possible place for children's story

### **Proclaiming God's Word**

New Testament scripture: Romans 12:1-8

Possible place for children's story

Possible place for special music

### **Message**

Based on above texts but tying together concepts of sacrifice and atonement in conjunction with the image of the altar/cross as a focal point for the gathering. This is a Thanksgiving service so the message should give emphasis to our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice on the cross and our own sacrifices or thank offerings made in response to Christ.

- Affirming our faith
- bringing Thanksgiving offerings to the altar
- Individuals or families bring prepared offerings which express, symbolically, their thankfulness to God. This act would be most effective if worshippers offerings actually represent some sort of sacrifice to made out of love for Christ and the church.
- prayer – as each worshipper brings his/her offering, the worship leader or pastor offers a prayer of thanksgiving for that worshipper, for his/her faith in Jesus Christ, and for his/her gift.
- response #387 (HWB) Lord, Thou dost love a cheerful giver

### **Witnessing**

#751 (HWB)

#411 (HWB) I bind my heart this tide

Sending

#427 (HWB) You shall go out with joy



## 5. The Church: *Cup of the Lord*

I Corinthians 10:16, 21

*This study was prepared by  
Mennonite Fellowship of Rosthern  
Rosthern Saskatchewan*

### **A. Biblical Study** *Primary Biblical texts*

- 1 Corinthians 10:16, 21

### *Other texts*

- 1 Corinthians 11:25; Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23;  
Luke 22:17,20

### *What this image means*

The Christians at Corinth were familiar with the image of the cup, since Paul writes that he had passed on to them the elements of the remembering ritual regarding Jesus' death and its significance (11:25). Those who participate in that cup indicate their acceptance and loyalty to Christ.

### *Why this image was used*

The cup is an elemental and accessible image for the church. Jesus chose everyday elements to be used in a special way for this followers to be reminded of him and the new kingdom to which they are invited. This symbol is not used as a direct description of the church or of believers (as in "you are the salt of the earth"), but in commemorating the death of Christ by drinking from the cup, and indicating commitment to him with that act, there is also acceptance of the cup as a symbol full of meaning. Like the bread, the cup symbolizes the unity from diversity which is possible in Christ. The church is the recipient of the salvation of Christ, his blood poured into it, his life given for it. In that sense the Church is the cup. It is also the contents of the cup, to be poured out for others. The cup's contents signified the new covenant. Our task is to share that Good News with the world.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

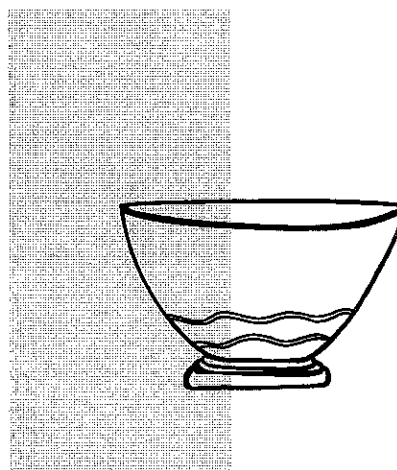
The image of the cup today reminds us in the church that we are to be an open vessel which accepts new people who want to share in the new life of Jesus, and be joined together as one body. Participation in the cup is, Paul says, participation in the blood of Christ. That level of identification and commitment should be something which we in the church consider seriously.

### *Use in a worship service*

The cup image is naturally an image that we would want to use in a worship setting which included communion.

### *A modern symbol*

A "modern day equivalent" was difficult to find. But,



given the Canadian national pastime of hockey, the Stanley Cup might be an interesting symbol. New "layers" of the cup are added to include the names of successive winners. For our purposes, those joining the church as believers would have their names added to the cup.

### *In the congregations*

We agreed that the cup image would be a rich symbol in many areas of congregational life. A number of years ago, everyone in the fellowship "decorated" unfired clay mugs which one member of the group had turned. Different designs were inscribed on the mugs, showing the unique and special identities of each member. Then the mugs were glazed and fired. For many years after, they were in use and were a reminder of a special activity and of the specialness of each member, young and old.

### *Use in a worship service*

In a communion service recently, we decided to use the cup as the symbol of our individual relationship with God, and the bread to remind us of our relationship in Christ to one another.

The person who led the cup portion read the Corinthians passage and talked about what it meant for first century believers to participate in "the cup of the Lord."

It was a way of reminding Christians of their reason for being. The sacrificial death of Christ gave them a common identity. As individual Jews and Gentiles, they acknowledged the death of Christ as their entry into a new covenant relationship with God... the participants also identified themselves as partners in Christ's work. As a Church they needed to be clear on their reason for having come into existence.

We were all then invited to take some quiet moments for meditation on "the cup of the Lord" in a personal and individual way, and to reflect on where our primary identity lies. We were also encouraged to think about our participation in the work begun by Christ. A response was invited. Pieces of paper and pencils were given to each person. We were invited to write a short prayer. As each participant came up to the front to be given a drink from the cup, they could place their prayer in a basket on the table holding the cup and the bread. Meditative music was the backdrop for the quiet writing time. A congregational song was sung as we shared the cup.



## 6. The Church: Vineyard

1 Corinthians 9:7

*This study was prepared by  
Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship  
Vancouver, British Columbia*

### A. Biblical Study

#### Primary Biblical texts

- 1 Corinthians 9:7, based on the assumption of Deuteronomy 20:6? Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Paul argues that anyone who plants churches is also entitled to enjoy the fruits thereof.
- John 15:1-6, I am the true vine and you are the branches—and the Father is the gardener?

#### Other texts

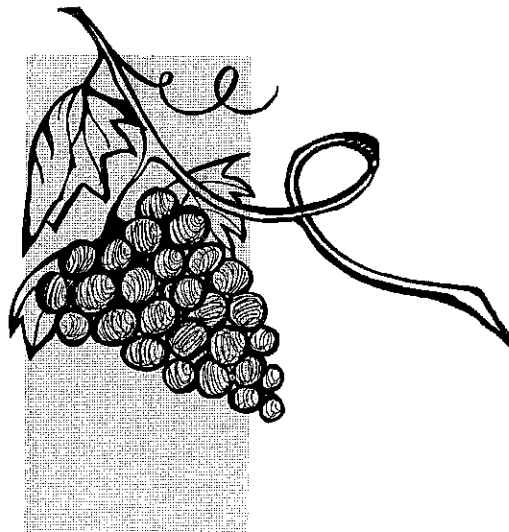
- Psalm 80:8-15, the vine brought out of Egypt
- Isaiah 5:1-7, song of the vineyard portrays the generosity of the gardener in providing fertile land, clearing out the stones, planting choice vines and building a watchtower and
- winepress and then experiencing the disappointment of bad fruit.
- Ezekiel 15:1-6, sovereignty of God and warning of the judgement of unfruitful vines.
- Isaiah 65:21, new heaven and new earth. They shall print vineyards?
- Micah 4:1-4, every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid (a symbol of security).
- Jeremiah 12:10-11, many shepherds will ruin my vineyard.
- Matthew 20:1-16, the parable of the workers in the vineyard.
- Matthew 21:28-41, parables of the two sons and of the tenants of the vineyard.
- Luke 13:6-8, parable of the unfruitful vine.

#### What this image means

The agricultural image of the vineyard would have been widely understood by the people of Israel as well as the Gentiles. The early church were Jewish and would readily have understood the parallel between Isaiah 5:1-7 and Jesus' parable of the tenants of Matthew 21:33-40. In 1 Corinthians 3:9—for we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field—as the Gentile believers came to see themselves as the New Israel, they would have applied the symbol of the vineyard to themselves. According to Micah 4:1-4, the vine and the fig tree were symbols of security and therefore the symbol of the vineyard would have been comforting to the early church.

#### Why this image was used

Familiarity of the image to the predominately rural people. The various aspects of the vineyard has application to many aspects of the church (e.g. quality of the soil,



removing stones, pruning, winepress, need for a watchtower, etc.). Symbolically the vine was the emblem of prosperity and peace among the ancient Hebrews. The vineyard symbolized the chosen people. At the last supper, the fruit of the vine symbolized the atoning blood of Christ and became the sacramental wine of the communion service. The fruit of the vine also symbolizes the life of the Holy Spirit. In Christian art, the fruitful vine has symbolized the union of Christ and his followers. The vineyard image emphasizes the sovereignty of God as the gardener as well as the centrality of Christ in the Church (John 15:1-5—I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener—I am the vine; you are the branches).

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### What our churches can learn

- The imperative of fruitfulness for the church (Luke 13:6-8).
- The danger and consequence of withering.
- The sovereignty of God as gardener of the vineyard (church).
- The generosity of God in providing all the essentials for a healthy and productive vineyard (church).
- The centrality of Christ in the church (I am the vine—you are the branches).
- The necessity for the painful experience of being pruned.
- God is responsible for pruning, not the fellow branches.
- God (not we) is the judge of the quality of the fruit and the consequence of fruitlessness.
- The need for unity of those attached to the True Vine.
- The need for fellowship and affirmation in the church (many plants growing in the same vineyard).
- The church is a place of security and protection for the individual plants.

#### Use in a worship service

- Mission Week because of the strong admonition to fruitfulness and the dire warning of fruitlessness.
- Communion service because of the fruit of the vine as the symbol of the substantial sacrifice of Christ and our oneness and unity in Christ.
- Thanksgiving as a celebration of our spiritual blessings as a church (vineyard) rather than/or in addition to material blessings (the generosity of the spiritual gardener).

- Continued page 14



### ***A modern symbol***

- The internet
- Car and battery

### ***In the congregations***

#### **Worship**

- A banner displaying vines would be especially appropriate for a communion service.
- A display of vines with grapes in place of the usual flowers in the church.
- Hymns that speak of vines: #373 Thou true Vine that heals, #390 God of the fertile fields, #568 As spring the winter doth succeed, #90 For the fruit of all creation #391 God, whose farm is all creation, #98 Sing to the Lord of harvest

#### **Sunday School**

John 15 or one of the vineyard parables could be used as the content for Sunday School.

#### **Mission education**

(see service outline below)

### ***Service Outline***

Mission Week (a display of grapes on a vine)

Gathering: Hymnal #664 (like the bud on a tree [vine], God's possibilities are about to blossom).



*Vineyard  
(Continued)*

Hymns: #90 For the fruit of all creation, thanks be to God, #373 Thou true Vine, that heals

Scripture: Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:28-41; Galatians 5:22-26

Offertory: Hymn #390

Testimony from someone in the congregation who has experienced the pain of pruning but also the resulting fruit.

Message: explaining Matthew 21 as parallel to Isaiah 5:1-7

Pastoral prayer: #72

Hymn #391 or the Micah Song (copyright c. 1977 by Patricia Shelly)

Congregational prayer #752

Gracious God, grant the words we have heard this day may be so grafted within our hearts that they bring forth fruit to the honour and praise of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN



# 7. The Church: God's field

1 Corinthians 3:9

*This study was prepared by  
Laird Mennonite Church  
Laird, Saskatchewan*

## A. Biblical Study

### *Primary Biblical text*

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 – in this passage Paul admonishes the Corinthian church for its divisions. They are following human leaders instead of recognizing God as the one who gives them everything they need. The church is the field: while people plant and water the field, it is God who makes it grow. All apostles are only servants of God.

### *Other texts*

- Mark 4:26-29 – the parable of the growing seed
- The church comes to life through the power of God. It is like a seed that the farmer plants. God, not people, bring the plant to maturity. All labors would be in vain if God did not cause the seed to grow.
- John 15:5 – The vine and the branches
- The vine is Jesus and we are the branches. To bear fruit we must remain attached to the Source of our growth, Jesus Christ.
- Mark 4:1-20 – The parable of the sower
- As God's Word is planted, each individual reacts differently according to the depth and quality of the soil. The "good soil" growth becomes a bumper crop of God's people. This provides hope for the church that may feel discouraged with apparently "failed" plantings.

### *What this image means*

Even though this is addressed to an urban church, the Corinthian people were not far removed from the source of their daily bread. Plants, fields and gardens were their life-giving sustenance. Unlike some urban people today, the Corinthians would have been well aware of the image of a farmer's field.

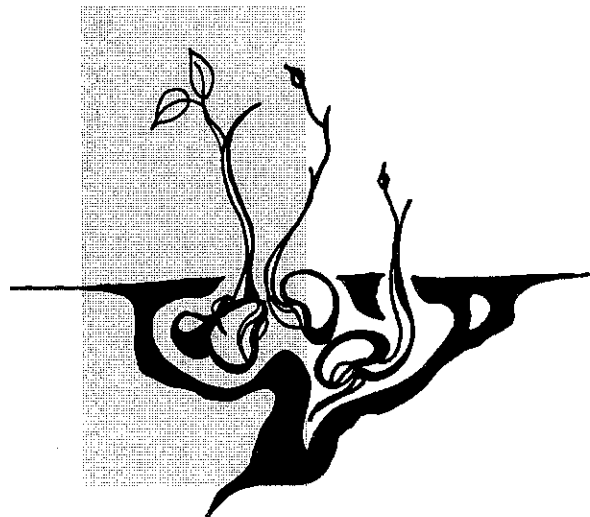
### *Why this image was used*

The Word of God was compared to a seed by Jesus in his teachings. It became part of Paul's thinking. As the world's greatest missionary, Paul thought of himself as a planter who seeded or planted the Word of God and helped start many churches. Paul was aware that while he planted, others watered, and God, the source of life, made the church grow. He chose this image because it is a simple analogy that his listeners could easily visualize and understand.

## B. Communicating in the congregation

### *What our churches can learn*

- A field doesn't come to maturity overnight, yet maturity



- of crop is the ultimate goal. Maturity in Christ (solid food, not milk) is what we are striving for.
- The seed reproduces itself – a complete replica. Can we become a replica, an imitation of Christ?
- It requires patience, but we know that the church is God's. We don't force the crop (or the church) to grow. God does it for us. Sometimes we can't see change or growth, but it is happening slowly and steadily.
- Unity is important in the church. In a field there is harmony – it is a whole. The plants are all equal in God's kingdom. Individualism will not build the church.
- Sometimes as Christians we get stuck in "potholes" (lower areas of the field that are often too wet to seed in spring but are seeded later). We might get stuck in these potholes or troubles, but eventually the growth there (because of our hardship) is more lush and fruitful than the rest of the field.
- As workers of the kingdom, we are merely servants of God, each humbly working to serve the Lord. We are followers of Jesus, not followers of people.

### *Use in a worship service*

- Pentecost – The field springs to life as it experiences the warmth of the sun's rays beating down on the black soil. Our lives experience new life as God's Spirit enters our hearts and our minds. The Holy Spirit fosters unity.
- Unity Sunday – (Week of Christian unity) The field is a beautiful symbol of a whole – one complete entity, full of life, growing to maturity. All Christians look to God as their source of power.
- Preparation for Annual Meeting – Divisions can be a sign of immaturity, according to Paul. The business of the church sometimes causes divisions because we act as if it is our church, instead of God's.

### *A modern symbol*

A modern day equivalent, known to most people, would be that of a garden. There are many different kinds of plants. The church has a wide variety of individuals with different gifts. The variety in the garden makes it a thing of beauty.

- Continued page 16



## ***In the congregations***

### **Worship**

- Have someone design a banner with an image of a farmer standing in a field of green heads of wheat. Title: "We are God's field" for display in the sanctuary.
- On the front door of the church that morning, and at strategic places in the foyer and in the Sunday school rooms, surprise the attenders with pictures of gardens, field, farm seeding, cultivating and harvesting equipment or perhaps with objects like watering cans, pails of wheat, flowers, etc. These would create a great "common experience" and would raise people's curiosity and anticipation for worship.
- Display in sanctuary – include flowers, seeds, watering cans, garden gloves, etc.
- Those involved in the service could wear "work clothes" (gardening outfits, overalls).

### **Skits:**

#### **1) "The Garden"**

Individuals (could be children or youth) would take on the roles of different parts that make up a garden, and state why they think they are the most useful, most beautiful, etc. Actors might assume the role of garlic (adds flavour and is healthy), marigolds (beautiful, bright, repel insects), corn (who is "best" because it is the tallest and remarks that both garlic and marigolds don't smell very good!), and humble potato (who is underground and underrated). Gardener comes in amidst the arguing and affirms each one as part of the whole.

#### **2) "The Three Seeds"**

An opening pantomime (based on 1 Cor.3:1-9)  
Four actors enter stage. (One planter, three seeds) The planter takes the seeds to different areas of the church and "plants" them by making him/her crouch down. All seeds are planted in similar fashion.  
A fifth actor (the waterer) enters and waters each of the "seeds". The seeds begin to wake up, grow and stretch in delight at the realization that each is alive. The first seed goes to thank the planter for life. The second seed (now grown) goes to thank the waterer. The third seed observes both, then turns away, kneels and raises hands to heaven to thank God. (background music during pantomime could be "We plow the fields and scatter" or other appropriate hymn which could be sung by the congregation following the play)

### **Sunday School**

A month before the worship service, announce a "Giving Project" for the Sunday School offering which would go towards purchasing seed for a developing country or garden seed for an MCC gardening project.  
A month before the service, have a children's story in which each child is given a styrofoam cup with "mystery seeds" planted in it. They could be referred to or labeled as "seeds of kindness," "seeds of hospitality," "seeds of friendship," etc. They are to grow them at home and bring them back for the special service (reminder phone calls will be involved!)  
Then, at the "Church is a field" worship service, the children show the plants that have grown. Ask the



children which one is bigger, prettier, better? What is more important work, planting or watering them? Make the point that all are unique and all make up a beautiful part of the whole.

Add these plants to the display at the front of the sanctuary.

### **Mission Education**

A symbolic act at the worship service could include the donation of money and/or seeds for the giving project described above.

### **Service Outline**

(see above for details on worship banner, worship centre, welcoming visuals, month ahead preparations)

Call to worship – "The Garden" skit or "Story of the Three Seeds"

Hymn #521 (Mennonite Hymnal) We plow the fields and scatter

Scripture Readings:

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

John 15:1-8

Prayer

Hymn #372 (HWB) O healing river

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:26-29

Time with Children "Who has the best plant?" (see above)

Song #129 (Sing and Rejoice) Unity

### **Sermon – We are God's Field**

The field comes to life in spring. We are God's field, and each has a part to play in the gifts one has been given and in the part one plays – the planting, the tending, the watering. A field grows because of the life that God gives it. A church finds life in God. A field matures and then there is a harvest ("look to the fields, they are ripe for harvest") A field has competition from birds and insects – the church must guard against all kinds of evil. If there is not enough focus on Christ, the Head, there will be no harvest. A harvest isn't guaranteed, there has to be vigilance. In order for a field to produce a harvest, it needs people to manage it...there must be good timing. The seed must be planted at the right time. For God's field (the church) to grow there needs to be good timing in our witness, we need to hear the people. We need to listen to God's Spirit telling us when a word is appropriate..

Congregational response – bring seeds and offerings to Worship Centre at the front of the sanctuary while music is played or sung.

Closing hymn #391 (HWB) God whose farm is all creation



## 8. The Church: *Building on the Rock*

Matthew 16:18-19

*This study was prepared by  
Eden Mennonite Church  
Chilliwack, British Columbia*

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary Biblical texts*

Matthew 16:18-19. The larger passage incorporating this image begins in Matthew 16: 13 where Jesus asks the disciples to inform him of the peoples identity of who he is, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus asks for the disciples personal statement of identity: "Who do you say that I am?" The disciples respond with what has become known as "as confession of faith," "...you are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Peter's statement, "You are the Christ..." became the Rock, the foundation on which Jesus would build his Church. Jesus' response to the confession of the disciple(s) brought about an identifying statement of witness which formed the basis for Jesus being on earth, namely to establish the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus responds to the confession of his Messiahship with these words, (paraphrased) "...Peter, my Father in heaven has revealed this to you...and on this rock I will build my Church."

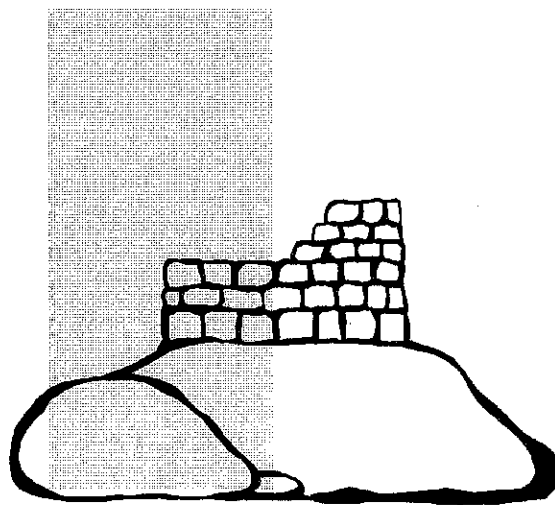
#### *Other texts*

- Romans 9:33
- Peter 2:4-8, While God and Christ are referred to as "the Rock" in both the Old and New Testament (Deuteronomy 32 and 1 Corinthians 10:4), the word that the Apostles Paul and Peter use are Stone/Rock. The above texts invite us to "...come to Christ, the living Stone,...you also, like living stones, are built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood...a stone that causes persons to stumble, a rock that makes them fall."

#### *What this image means*

The word Rock meant stability, durability, security. It would have reminded the Israelite people of a place of remembrance—a memorial. Many times God asked the Children of Israel to build a memorial out of stones/rocks in order to remember an event. A rock endures the test of time. A rock/cement foundation is poured to ensure a secure structure.

The Jewish people would have remembered Moses' words to them in the Pentateuch where Yahweh is



referred to as the Rock in four verses. Yahweh was their source of strength—he was their foundation.

During the years of the Wilderness Wanderings of the Israelites, the Gentile nations feared the God of the Israelites. His power and authority was recognized and feared. In the New Testament, the Gentiles were given the privilege of building their spiritual house on the Rock of Christ.

#### *Why this image was used*

Something has to form the foundation of a belief, of a conviction. Since the name Peter/Cephas means Rock, Jesus took the opportunity to focus on the "solidness" or strength of Peter's confession, "You are the Christ". This confession has become the foundation of the Church, as well as the foundation of an individual's spiritual life. By using the image of a rock, Jesus portrayed the concept of strength, stability and longevity.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

Verbal confession is very important. While Peter verbalizes his understanding of who Jesus was, the other disciples agreed. We do not know what their verbal reaction to Peter's statement was, other than agreement. Today members of the church are expected to individually identify Jesus as the Christ. This confession becomes the foundation/basis of one's faith. This confession is the Rock of faith on which we build our lives. There is strength, security, stability and assurance on being able to identify Jesus as the Christ. Faith in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah is a source of immense encouragement for persons suffering illness, persecution, or issues of various kinds. Persons without such faith struggle with many uncertainties.

#### *Use in a worship service*

- Lent focuses on the life-giving act of Jesus, his sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary. His death brought about redemption for all mankind. He truly was "the Christ—the Messiah". His death (and resurrection) became the foundation of our redemption. Jesus became the "rock on which we build our faith". - *Continued page 1*



- Missions week is a time when persons are invited to become followers of the Christ. They are invited to become citizens of Christ's kingdom. Non-believers are reminded that all persons must make a personal commitment/a personal confession of who Jesus is. They are taught that all kingdoms fail except the kingdom of Christ. The confession is the foundation of their faith, the rock on which they build their spiritual life. The rock is the church to which they belong.
- Baptism: testimonies in which persons state that they are building on the foundation of Christ, the rock of their salvation..

### ***A modern symbol***

Rocks play varying roles, depending on the place one lives. A farmer clears the field of as many stone/rocks as he is able. A gardener will go to great lengths to find a rock which will enhance the design of his/her garden. A Native Canadian will listen to the stories the rock tells him of his/her ancestors. To help the congregation understand the image of the confession as Rock, it may be necessary to bring into church a piece (small) of reinforced concrete and describe the importance of its strength. In areas where rocks are used for building, such could be brought as a visual aid.

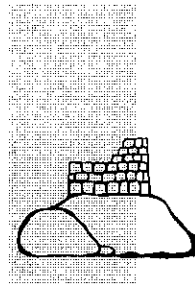
### ***In the congregations***

#### **Worship**

Scripture texts which center on the confession of faith, and the building on the rock, the strength of that confession. Or one could have the theme of the church—with its confession of Christ as Lord. A rock/stone/piece of reinforced concrete could be the center piece—a visual aid.

#### **Sunday School**

Stories from the Old Testament describing the significance of the Rocks, memorials, places of remembrance. Native Canadian stories—many seniors have stories of Rocks. These stories could have spiritual significances. Have a fairly large rock available—but never forget to let the children know the importance of Peter's confession.



*Building on  
the Rock  
(continued)*

#### **Mission education**

The strength of Christ's kingdom, evidence in the growing church around the world.

Other kingdoms fail, but Christ's will lasts forever.

#### ***Service Outline***

##### **Hymns:**

The Church's one foundation  
My hope is built on nothing less  
Build on the Rock the Church does stand  
The wiseman built his house upon the Rock  
Christ is our cornerstone  
Christ is made the sure foundation  
Jesus, from whom all blessings flow  
Faithful One  
I Believe in Jesus

##### **Scripture:**

Deuteronomy 32

Matthew 16:13-19

1 Peter 2:4-10

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Children's Story: The story of the wise and foolish men  
(Matthew 7)—a story out of history.

Message: based on one of the above texts.



## 9. The Church: Pillar and buttress

1 Timothy 3:15

*This study was prepared by  
Niverville Mennonite Church  
Niverville, Manitoba*

### **A. Biblical Study** *Primary Biblical texts*

- Matthew 16:18
- 1 Corinthians 3:10, 11
- Revelation 3:12
- Romans 15:20
- Ephesians 2:20
- Isaiah 28:16
- Matthew 7:25
- Luke 14:29
- 2 Timothy 2:19
- Hebrews 6:1

### *What this image means*

Things are not always what they seem to be—things and people are not 100% reliable. Therefore, Paul needed to underscore the trustworthiness of these words (1 Timothy 3:1).

### *Why this image was used*

Knowing how we are to conduct ourselves—requires confidence in the truth—thus the strength of the image. Paul, in the context of 1 Timothy, in the event he is delayed in coming to them, needed to give instruction, i.e. behaviour/church conduct. He instructs them on false teaching (1:3-7, 4:1-8, 6:3-5, 20, 21), responsible church disbp (?), worship & practical advice (elders, widows [chapter 5]). These themes need to be guided about with truth—regarding church images.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

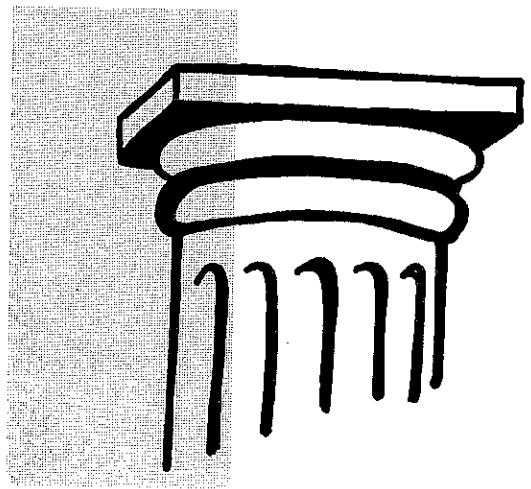
The church needs to be re-awakened to the standard of Scripture.

### *Use in a worship service*

Anniversary celebration—"cornerstone" image to "solid faith" in baptism, marriage ceremonies.

### *A modern symbol*

Building construction: bridges, high rises, office towers—even homes use "piers"/columns—into the earth; to provide a solid foundation upon which to build structure. Avoids problems of sifting/shifting of layers beneath the foundation.



### *In the congregations*

Worship

Songs

1. Jesus is the Cornerstone
2. The Church's One Foundation
3. Rock of Ages
4. My Hope is Built on Nothing Less
5. Christ is made my Sure Foundation
6. O Where are Kings & Empires
7. How Firm a Foundation
8. Christ is our Cornerstone
9. Mighty Fortress is our God....a "bulwark" never failing.

Why is it never failing?

Because of the piers or columns that support it.



# 10. The Church: Virgins

## Revelation 14

*This study was prepared by  
Blumenort Mennonite Church  
Gretna, Manitoba*

### A. Biblical Study *Primary Biblical texts*

Revelation 14, especially verses 1-5  
2 Corinthians 11:1-6  
Matthew 25:1-13

#### *Other texts*

Ephesians 5:21-33 (the marriage section) uses the image of Christ and the bride (the church). The theme of "spiritual virginity" is closely related to the texts above.

#### *What this image means*

The Jews were quite familiar with the virgin image in the Old Testament where God again and again speaks of Israel's betrothal to Him; Israel's unfaithfulness is described as prostitution. For the Corinthians, whose background of marital understanding was radically different and faithfulness as a virgin bride of Christ, a new and radical concept, virginity was a picture of the newness, the freshness of the Gospel.

#### *Why this image was used*

The entire Gospel story is a story of a lover, God, seeking His beloved. When the beloved responds to God's overtures, he then becomes His alone. The church consists of those who were once not a people, but now are the people of God. As God's virgin, cleaned, washed, purified, it behooves the church to remain pure and to resist...and spurn the rivals of God in whatever form they appear.

### B. Communicating in the congregation *Use in worship service*

Use in any season, but the times of covenant making with God and the church, and becoming part of the church (baptism), would be especially appropriate times. It would be a good time to use this as an image of the newly baptized as the special chosen bride of Christ.

#### *In the congregations*

##### **Worship**

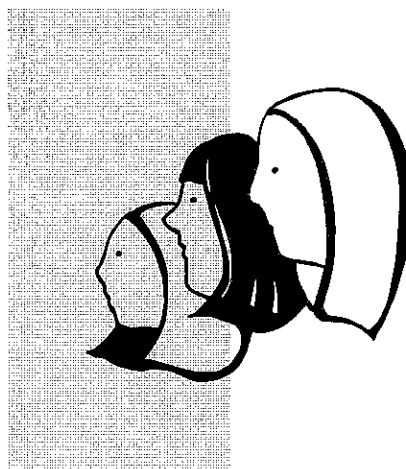
Banners focusing on God's love for us in Jesus Christ. A banner response – a hand reaching out for the outstretched hand of Christ.

##### **Sunday School**

A focus on the specialness, the chosenness of children. (primary and elementary classes)

##### **Mission Education**

There is a lot of depression, sense of failure, guilt and



spoilage in our society. Christ's invitation to virginity, a clean slate, a new start as His chosen one, His challenge to a life of faithfulness and single-minded purpose are an invitation.

#### *Service Outline*

Baptism Service – Revelation 14:1-5 (CEV)

The image of the church in this text is that of the church as "virgin."

Gathering hymns

#14 (HWB) We that love the Lord

#29 (HWB) Like the murmur of the dove's song

Greeting time ("holy bedlam" – Robert Webber)

Responsive Reading of Psalm 24 #815 (HWB)

Prayer Time led by pastor or worship leader and inviting participation from the congregation

Pantomime "Parable of the 10 virgins" Matthew 25:1-3

(involves 10-12 people)

Congregational Singing

#188 (HWB) Sleeper, Wake!

#437 (HWB) Count well the cost

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:28-42 (while not using the virgin image, this passage is a powerful link to Revelation 14:1-5 and gives different faces to the 144,000, to the "virgin" crowd; daughters, sons, men and women)

Testimonies of baptismal candidates

Covenant of congregation and candidates (could include the reading of #775 HWB)

Baptism

Reception into membership

Prayer of Blessing

Singing

#439 (HWB) I want Jesus to walk with me - flowing into -

#434 (HWB) Thuma mina

Meditation: Scripture text Rev. 14:1-5 (CEV)

Closing Hymn

#50 (HWB) Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah

Benediction

Meditation (thoughts to get started)

The Revelation 14:1-5 picture in the Contemporary English Version (CEV) is just marvelous. The sharp outlines would not have been missed by the seven churches to whom the Revelation is given. Seven churches of the Roman Empire for whom faithfulness, prostitution, virginity, adultery,



loyalty to Christ, and loyalty to world systems were vivid images of daily life.

The scene lends itself to a discussion of purity. The virgins of Revelation 14:1-5 were not born pure, had not led lives free of sin, were not ones who had never brought shame upon themselves, their families and their God. No! But as Mary Magdalene, once possessed by seven demons, they had become "virgins" - forgiven, cleansed, empowered, faithful.

They were now in the presence of their Lord. They had not prostituted themselves to the Emperor, even under great duress, but had kept their vows to their beloved bridegroom. They were the faithful church described in Ephesians 5:22-32. Their loving Lord had walked with them even in the valley of the shadow of death. Their resources had always been replenished, their strength renewed. The Scripture calls these virgins "the most precious people on earth." They are people who know that they are deeply loved. God's love for them and their love for God never abated even when their "spiritual virginity" was attacked constantly by: a thousand lures to burn incense to the emperor; a thousand seductions to betray their Lord to the deities flourishing in their social religious and political milieu. How relevant for our time!

Do we not need to know that we are the "most precious people on this earth?" Can we not all name someone else who needs to know this? Do we not need to know that we are loved? Can we not all name someone else who needs to know this too?

How deeply people need to see and feel the purity, the integrity, the "spiritual virginity" as the reborn children of God is represented by the response to daily challenges. We see it reflected by despair, teenage suicide, rampant materialism, secularism, a culture of violence, rich/poor dichotomy, family dysfunction and disintegration, social injustice, racism, spiritual and social vacuum and boredom.

The virginity, faithfulness to the bridegroom alone, becomes ever more the normal life of the maturing follower of Christ. It comes from living the Jesus life day by day.

And then we get that beautiful view through the window into heaven. We see the 144,000, the virgins, standing with the Lamb, singing a new song that no one else could even learn. ...they follow the Lamb wherever he leads.

Suffering?! Hard path?! Tough! Challenge! Yes, absolutely! Yet what an abundant life of the baptized of Christ. A life of love in the ordinariness of our world. How thoroughly of earth. How thoroughly of this world. How thoroughly of heaven.

... They have been rescued to be presented to God... The words of Peter ring true: "Once you were a nobody. Now you are God's people."  
1 Peter 2:10A (CEV)

Resource: *The Promise*, Contemporary English Version, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1995.



# 11. The Church: The Messiah's Mother

Revelation 12:1-2

*This study was prepared by  
Grace Mennonite Church  
Steinbach, Manitoba.*

## A. Biblical Study

### *Primary Biblical texts*

Revelation 12:1-2, A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

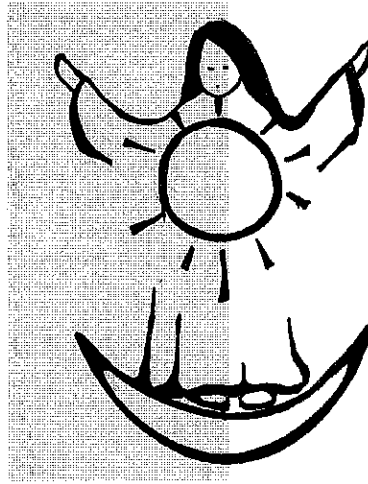
### *Other texts*

- Isaiah 26:17, Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near her time, so were we because of you, O LORD.
- Isaiah 66:6-9, Listen, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the LORD, dealing retribution to his enemies! Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children. Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the LORD; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God.
- Micah 4:9-10, Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labor? Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the LORD will redeem you from the hands of your enemies.

### *What this image means*

To the people who first heard or read it:

- People (Israel) realized the pain of being away from the presence of God, yet are assured they will live again; there is hope in spite of present distress. This is a general observation from the OT references.
- The Revelation text is elusive, steeped in metaphor. Seems to describe the constant threat (from evil) under which the woman (church) lives. The text seems to associate the woman with Israel (old & new) as evidenced by the crown of 12 stars; the one she is birthing is her firstborn, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The woman enjoys the protection of God as one who is faithful; her offspring are also faithful (v17) and raise the ire of the dragon.
- Church of Revelation would have seen a description of their situation—suffering and under threat, along with the reassurance that God has triumphed over evil and will



sustain his faithful people.

### *Why this image was used*

Connected with OT scripture familiar to early Christians; feminine image of a woman of pure faith giving birth (an image of virginity which alludes to the mother of Christ?) Connects us with birth of Christ, birth of the church, Pauline image of creation itself groaning as if in labour until such time as the kingdom will come in its fullness.

## B. Communicating in the Congregation

### *What our churches can learn*

- In the midst of difficulty and trials in the church, God acts to redeem and we are assured of God's triumph.
- We will be rescued/God has rescued his faithful from destruction (c.f. Lord's Prayer: "deliver us from evil").
- We are part of the 'rest of the descendants' (offspring of the woman/church) in 12.13, thus our suffering and our hope is one with the suffering and hope of the church in Revelation.
- God allows the devil to do his work in the world, but God is still in control.

### *Use in a worship service*

- In times of stress and strain, as a word of hope.
- At Advent as an image of the Messiah's coming into a struggling world?
- Any service which would focus on the blurring of evil and good in our society and a clear reminder that there are two paths, two spiritual realities and outcomes.

### *A modern symbol*

Birthing of a child is still a contemporary image (struggle, stress, and vulnerability of mother and child during and after birth).

### *In the congregations*

Worship/Sunday School/Mission education

The practical uses of this text received little response in our discussion. One might draw benefit from it in an education setting much as this present study has done.

### *Service Outline*

(see above - Use in a worship service)



## 12. The Church: *Bride of Christ*

2 Corinthians 11:1-2  
Ephesians 5:21-31  
Revelation 21:2-4  
Revelation 19:7-9

*This study was prepared by  
First Mennonite Church  
Edmonton, Alberta*

### **A. Biblical Study** *Primary Biblical texts*

- 2 Corinthians 11:1-2;
- Ephesians 5:21-31;
- Revelation 21:2-4;
- Revelation 19:7-9

### *Other texts*

- Matthew 9:14-15, bridegroom and wedding guests
- John 3:27-30, John the Baptist speaks of the coming bridegroom
- Romans 7:1-4, description of expectations within marriage relationship
- Isaiah 54: 5-7, "the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken"
- Isaiah 62:4-5, "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall..."
- Hosea 2:19-20, "I will take you for my wife in faithfulness"
- Jeremiah 31:31-32, "though I was their husband"
- Ezekiel 16:8-14, God's covenant with the bride

### *What this image means*

*Positively:* protection, intimacy, faithfulness, steadfastness, investment in relationship, mutuality, accountability, vulnerability, sensuality and ecstasy, order in relationships.

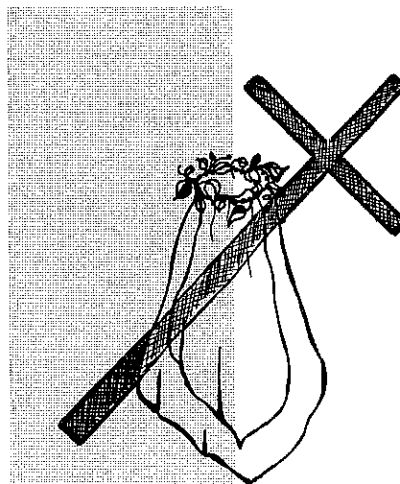
*Negatively:* power and control issues (male "over" female), "possession" of female by male, danger of viewing relationship in terms of contract rather than covenant.

### *Why this image was used*

Our group was of two minds on this question. On one side, we felt that many of the writings listed above point to very positive realities of the church's relationship with God: commitment, intimacy, purity, order, celebration and even ecstasy. However, our impression of Paul's thinking on the subject was not so positive, noting his numerous allusions to power and control in the wife/husband relationship, and thinking as a result of a jealous God who wants to keep "the bride" in line.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

Wedding/Bridegroom/Bride: festive sense of celebration,



exuberance and excitement of young love, joyful abandoning of self to the lover.

Marriage: that which makes for healthy, growing relationships, commitment that carries through "sickness & health, better or worse", etc.

### *Use in a worship service*

Summertime: "the season of weddings"

Lent: acknowledging both the joy & the challenge of intimate relationships.

### *A modern symbol*

The group pondered images such as lover, marriage partner. We also wondered aloud how this would feel were we to consider the "other" alternative—church as the "husband" of Christ.

### **In the congregations**

#### **Worship**

While preaching and teaching received honourable mention in our discussion, it was prayer that seemed to be the most obvious place in which to utilize this image. Its intimacy, joyfulness and even its potential sensuality commended it to us. We also noted that image invites us to consider our relationship to God in Christ in more complete terms, acknowledging not only the beauty and wonder but also the frustrations and the hurts that happen in this amazing and intimate relationship we have with our God (or perhaps more correctly, which our God has with us). Use of the name "Lover" in our praying (as well as any other such intimate marriage-related names) might help us to explore these different facets of God's relationship with us.

#### *Service Outline*

Used analogously in a wedding ceremony, or some other celebration of marriage (such as an anniversary). Reflection on the loving, challenging intimacy of God's relationship with us might happen well in a prayer service using readings, songs, and times of quiet.



# 13. The Church: Wearers of White Robes

Rev. 19:7; Matthew. 22:1-14

*This study was prepared by  
Winkler Berghaler Church  
Winkler, Manitoba.*

## A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical Texts

- Revelation 6:11
- Revelation 7:9-14
- Revelation 3:4-5, 18

\*Note: the texts given applied more directly to #24, the wedding feast.

## Other texts

The wedding feast requires wearing appropriate garments.

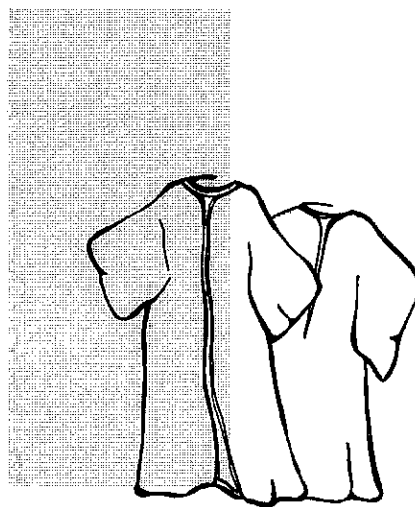
- In the marriage of the Lamb and his bride in Revelation 19:7-9, the Bride, i.e. the church is granted bright and pure clothing of fine linen as a reward for "the righteous deeds of the saints."
- In the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22, verses 11 and 12 illustrate that the right kind of garment, namely a wedding garment, needs to be worn.

## What this image means

- The robe, for the Jewish people, was significant. The robe was a symbol of position, honour and authority. We have the story of Isaac giving a special robe with long sleeves to his most favoured son, Joseph (Genesis 37:3). In Exodus 28 we have a detailed description of the high quality and ornate robes that the Israelite priests were to wear.

When David and the Levites carry the Ark of the Covenant (a significant moment), the writer points out that they were wearing robes of fine linen. In the parable of the prodigal (lost) son, the father says to bring the best robe for the son (Luke 15:22) as a symbol of acceptance and re-establishing his status as a son.

- The robe is sometimes used as a mockery. After Jesus has been on trial, a scarlet robe is placed on him in mockery of his supposed claim to be "King of the Jews." In Luke 20:46 Jesus warns against those "who like to go about in long robes" under the pretense of being holy and righteous people.
- The white garments of angels or messengers of God must have been significant to the New Testament writers. These details are mentioned at the resurrection of Jesus, Matthew 28:3, and at his ascension, Acts 1:10. Certainly impressive was the garment of Jesus in his



transfiguration experience. We are told in Mark 9:3 his garments became glistening, intensely white.

- To the Jewish people the language of a robe and its significance would have been well understood.

## Why this image was used

The significance of the church as wearers of white robes would be four-fold. They are:

### a) A symbol of purity

Persons who have been cleansed; washed in the blood of the Lamb are worthy to wear white robes, according to Revelation 7:14 and 3:4. We might take note of Zechariah describing a vision where Joshua is seen with filthy garments standing before an angel of God. He was required to remove the filthy garments and put on "rich" garments because his iniquity had been removed from him.

### b) A reward for faithfulness and victory

It is a reward for those who were "slain for the word of God and the witness they bore, Revelation 6:9-11; those "who have come out of the great tribulation," Revelation 7:14; and those who are conquerors, Revelation 3:5.

### c) A symbol of equality

Revelation 7:9 points out that there will be before the throne of God, and the Lamb a great multitude, beyond number, "from every nation, from all the tribes and peoples and tongues. This would want to imply that, although on earth there are many differences, before God they are all equal and unified in praise and worship.

### d) To cover their nakedness

In the letter to the church in Laodicea it was suggested that they put on "white garments to clothe (themselves) and to cover the shame of (their) nakedness from being seen," Revelation 3:18. One can't help but be reminded of Adam and Eve after their disobedience who had to cover their nakedness, however, with fig leaves, Genesis 3:7. Genesis 3:21 says God clothed them with skins.



## **B. Communicating in the congregation**

### ***What our churches can learn***

The idea of cleansing and purification as well as faithfulness is certainly something that our churches need to be reminded of and toward which they need to be encouraged and helped. It is the concept of all peoples of the earth being equal in the eyes of God that we need to learn.

### ***Use in a worship service***

An appropriate time to use this image would perhaps be during the time of Lent when the focus is often on confession and cleansing as we approach the cross. The image could also be used during a time when we consider the 2<sup>nd</sup> advent of our Lord, when the Bride will be called for the "marriage feast" whether that be during the traditional Advent season or at another time. Perhaps the time when we celebrate the ascension of Jesus into heaven could also be a time to consider this theme, especially if we consider the aspects of the rewards for the faithful.

### ***A modern symbol***

A container of bleach, Spic n' Span, a basin of water with soap and a scrubbing brush or other cleaning tools could serve as a modern symbol of the cleansing image.

### ***In the congregations***

#### **Worship**

Call to worship: #81 from Words for Worship by Arlene M. Mark (uses Rev. 7)

Choral Song: I got shoes, you got shoes, all God's children got shoes (song includes a verse "I got a robe...") – Afro American spiritual  
Several other "robe" spirituals – "Set down servant" & "Ain't that good news"

#### **Hymns:**

- #615 (HWB) Shall we gather at the river (verse 3 "robe")
- #121 (HWB) Holy God, we praise thy name (verse 3, "white robed martyrs")
- #106 (HWB) All hail the power of Jesus name (verse 3, "every kindred and tribe")
- #296 (HWB) Here from all nations (based on Rev. 7:9-17)
- #319 (HWB) Jesus shall reign

#### **Banner idea:**

One could begin with one (perhaps 2) person in an off-white or other colored robe ("soiled" at that) moving towards the cross. On the other side of the cross, signifying one has come through the cross i.e. the blood of the Lamb, another person together with other figures of people are moving towards a sea of white robes focussed on a throne.

**Drama:** Scenes of asking forgiveness, restoring relationships, leaving burdens behind, walking away free and light and joyful would be quite appropriate with this image.

#### **Mission Education**

The idea of the equality of all peoples could be a good point to emphasize in the context of global missions.



# 14. The Church: Citizens

Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10

*This study was prepared by  
Zion Mennonite Church  
Swift Current, Saskatchewan*

## A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical Text

Ephesians 2:19 "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God."

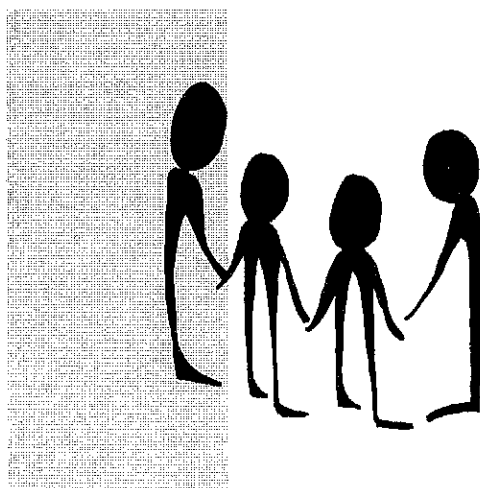
The context of the letter to the Ephesians reveals a situation where Gentile Christians were streaming into the church. They came without a Jewish background in a strong moral code. In fact, these newcomers to the church were quite boastful of their independence of all things Jewish and intolerant toward their Jewish brothers and sisters. Ephesians points to a united church where Jews and Gentiles find their true place. The unity of this universal society which is nothing less than Christ's body.

In chapter 2:19 the writer attempts to make this point by use of a political analogy comparing citizens and foreigners. "no longer strangers and aliens" Christians, even new to the faith, are neither like foreigners with no rights in the community, or aliens enjoying only temporary limited rights as residents. Rather, they are full members of the community enjoying all the rights and privileges thereof. Citizens in this context means no inferior status but members of the historic community of God's people. This new citizenship is conceived as membership in the family of God.

### Other texts

The word "citizen" is translated from the Greek and Hebrew in several different English translations. It occurs 32 times in the Good News Bible in Today's English Version. In the New Revised Standard Version it occurs 12 times, listed below:

- Leviticus 17:15  
"All persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals, shall wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening; then they shall be clean."
- Leviticus 23:42  
"You shall live in booths for seven days all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths."
- Leviticus 24:16  
"One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer."



Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death."

- Joshua 24:11  
"When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you."
- Jeremiah 32:32  
"Because of all the evil of the people of Israel and the people of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger – they, kings and their priests and their prophets, the citizens of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem."
- Ezekiel 47:22  
"You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourself and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes."
- Luke 15:15  
"So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs."
- Luke 19:14  
"But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him saying, 'We do not want this man to rule over us'."
- Acts 16:37-38  
"But Paul replied, 'They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.' The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens."
- Acts 19:35  
"But when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, 'Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven?'"



### ***What this image means***

In the Old Testament period Israel learned to interpret itself as being a brotherhood of God's people. As Israel's sons and daughters they were a nation, a family if you will, which traced their decent to twelve brothers as the fathers of the 12 founding tribes. Israel's understanding of itself influenced the mutual relationships of its individual members. For example, the ancient prohibition of usury which is formulated for the benefit of the poor is enforced on the basis that all Israelites are brethren and counted among God's family, no one should enrich themselves through another's need.

In Leviticus the reader is given the command to love one's neighbour who is not from the community, which has no parallel among the law codes of the Ancient Near East. Even in Leviticus 19:34 the text expressly includes the non-Israelite, who lives as a protected citizen in Israel.

In the New Testament period citizenship was understood only in the context of the city. There is no comparable understanding to our notion of national citizenship. Roman citizenship for example meant being a citizen of the city of Rome. In the New Testament period the advantages of this were social, economic and legal. The Romans were quite free with confirming citizenship of Rome upon other peoples, something which was unheard of in the ancient world. Thus in the middle and later years of the empire, more and more non-Romans acquired Roman citizenship.

Roman citizenship conferred economic and legal and social status rights above the rest of the population under Roman administration. Prohibitions against flogging or binding a Roman citizen as well as the execution of an individual unless under a Roman court was akin to murder.

Legal rights included the right of a fair trial and generally more respectful treatment than others under the law. Roman citizens were therefore elevated above the rest of the population and these privileges and advantages were codified into law.

### ***Why this image was used***

The word citizen infers being a part of, whether it is a city, an ethnic group, a nation. In reference to church it refers to being a part of the church, part of the family of God. As such it confers certain responsibilities and obligations, but also rights or privileges as part of this family. It is an in-group term but not necessarily understood as exclusive. As revealed in the scriptures all can be invited and become citizens. It is also a unifying term giving all citizens the same privileges and responsibilities enjoyed by everyone within the community.

## **B. Communicating in the congregation**

### ***What our churches can learn***

We live and worship in a context where there seems to be increasing pressure to simply welcome people and not talk about church membership. There are people who want to be baptized but do not want to take up membership in the church. Citizenship suggests that:

- being part of the church entails responsibility and commitment
- there are things that are expected from both the "country" (e.g. protection, help like medicare, education, etc.) and the citizen (e.g. serve in times of need, taxes, democratic process, etc.). These mutual responsibilities translate well into the church setting.
- there are rites of passage that need to be honoured
- there are differences between tourists (visitors), those on work visas (e.g. MCC volunteers here for two years), landed immigrants (those who have moved here and are attending full time but need some time to consider full membership) and citizens (full members).

Citizenship is available to any and all – it transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries on one hand (note, in our cities, Italian sections, Chinese sections, French sections and so on) and yet at the same time there is a certain culture that ties all citizens together. The same is true of church.

We have citizens who do not have voting rights, e.g. children born in Canada but not yet 18 years old. There might be ways of using this as we try to address the issue of how we help our children feel like they are part of the congregation but do not necessarily have all the rights and privileges of adult membership.

The differences between countries who have tough citizenship laws (e.g. some European countries like Germany) and those where it is easy to become a citizen (e.g. Canada). Citizenship can be used negatively as a barrier or positively as a way of welcoming people.

### ***Use in a worship service***

- around July 1 when we are thinking about the fact that we are citizens of Canada and what that means
- Baptism Sunday as new people are made "citizens" of the kingdom of God.
- Membership transfer services
- An annual covenanting service that some churches have
- A Sunday immediately around the week when recent immigrant members of the congregation become citizens of Canada
- Child dedication Sunday might be another occasion. It would give opportunity to talk about the child as part of "members" of the congregation yet without all the rights and privileges of membership.

### ***A modern symbol***

"Citizen" works well today, especially in light of the fact that many Mennonite congregations in the last 25 years have been involved in sponsoring refugees and many have found homes and membership in our congregations.

Another symbol that would work in a similar way, is foster child and adoption.

- Continued page 28



## ***In the congregations***

### **Worship**

- use aspects of the civil citizenship ceremony including the pledge and adapt it for use in the service. This would be especially suitable in a covenanting service.
- develop a congregational logo, flag or banner
- hymns: (Worship Book)
  - # 306 In Christ there is no east or west
  - #145 There's a wideness in God's mercy
  - #405 Where cross the crowded ways
  - #296 Here from all nations
  - #226 You are salt for the earth

### **Sunday School**

- conversations about citizenship using the pledge used by Canada
- using a flag and talking about what it represents
- national anthem – can we have a church anthem?

### **Mission Education**

- conversations about how we include people who come to our congregation as they make faith commitments, especially what it means to extend to them full citizenship rights. This is really the central thought of the Ephesians text where the word appears.

### **Service Outline**

All numbers refer to Hymnal: a Worship Book.

Gathering Song: In Christ there is no east or west OR Here from all nations

Call to Worship: Psalm 24 (this psalm can be adapted to be read responsively or antiphonally. It can be read leader and people, or leader and two groups of people with some parts read by all the people)

Prayer of Invocation

Praise songs:

All hail the power of Jesus' name

Jesus thou mighty Lord OR Shine, Jesus, Shine (chorus – not in HWB)



*Citizens  
(Continued)*

Come and See

Confession: #697

Prayers of the People

Old Testament Scripture: Joshua 24:14-28

Song: I bind my heart this tide

New Testament Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Sermon Options:

- an expository sermon on the Ephesians text
- the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. He went from landed immigrant status (a Roman worshipper of God) to full citizenship. The story includes wonderful lessons about who is welcome and how we tend to exclude people.
- a sermon on "Privileges and Responsibilities of Citizenship"
- Ephesians 2, the entire chapter, traces the journey from enemy alien to full citizenship.
- Daniel 1 – this story highlights the tensions of being citizens of two kingdoms. It encourages the saying of "yes" to citizenship in an earthly political entity but living always with the readiness to say "no."

Song: determined by which sermon topic is used

Offering

Announcements

Benediction



# 15. The Church: Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

*This study was prepared by  
Sargent Ave. Mennonite Church  
Winnipeg, Manitoba*

## A. Biblical Study

### Primary biblical texts

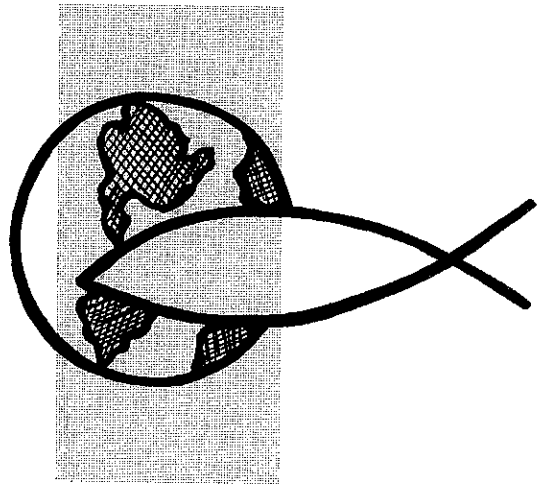
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he works at convincing the church at Corinth of his commitment to Christ; reflected in his life choices and decisions (He is defending his character as he has run into criticism and misunderstanding during his travels). Paul is an ambassador for Christ. He encourages his readers to be ambassadors as well, delivering the message of reconciliation through word and deed.
- Ephesians 6:20, an ambassador is one who must speak with *boldness*. An ambassador may be in *chains* literally and figuratively.
- Ezekiel 17:15, ambassadors were sent to Egypt to *negotiate/bargain* for horses and an army.
- Proverbs 13:17, a bad messenger brings trouble, but a *faithful envoy, healing*.
- Isaiah 30:4, pharaoh had vast envoys but the people of Israel did not profit in trying to take refuge in Egypt.
- Isaiah 31:7, envoys of peace weep at the destruction of Egypt.
- Isaiah 18:2, ambassadors going as *messengers to another nation/people*.

### What this image means

Corinth, being a port city, saw people of "many kinds" come and take up residence. For many of them, they knew what it would mean to be in a "foreign" land. The people of that day would have been familiar with the role of an ambassador, going into a foreign situation. They also would have understood that an ambassador was sent by a higher authority. Their role was not only that of a messenger, but the ambassadors of that day actively worked at persuading others to join the Roman Empire. Paul, in his letter to the church at Corinth tells the Jews, Gentiles and Corinthians that there is an alternative way of living. The church members at Corinth are asked to be ambassadors *sent by God with a message that persuades* others to be part of the Christian family.

### Why this image was used

Ambassadors went to foreign places to do their work. The message of reconciliation was a foreign message. This image paralleled very well what was happening in Rome at the time. This was also a way for Paul to explain (in language the Corinthians would understand) what he felt his role was. The term ambassador fit with the mission of the church as well as Paul's life.



## B. Communicating in the congregation

### What our churches can learn

Churches might learn a number of things from this Biblical image:

- Realize their missions as having a "prophetic" message from God.
- Reminder that we represent God, not just an organization or a small group of people.
- Learn the language of the people – know how to communicate the message.
- The idea of urgency in bringing people into the faith.
- Work to gain respect (as an ambassador might) first, before we give the message.
- Recognize that we could be misunderstood (as Paul was).

This message could be/should be used any time/all the time. Would be a good image to use for a sending or a benediction at the close of a service. The image would also be excellent for a missions emphasis week where we talk about bringing the message to the world. Special celebrations such as baptism, Pentecost, deacons or pastoral installations could also focus on people choosing to be God's ambassadors.

Although people today are familiar with the position of ambassador, the role of the Roman ambassador and the ambassadors of today seem considerably different. During Paul's writings the ambassadors were very passionate in their role of bringing people "into the fold." Today's ambassadors perform a much more diplomatic role than evangelical one. A mission worker or a member of a Christian peacemaker team may be a more accurate modern day image. Or how about a postal courier?

### Use in a worship service

- Dramatic Scripture reading - "Let All Within us Praise" p.135 (Patricia Shelly, F&L Press)
- Call to worship – Worship Anthology Vol.3 p.7
- Litanies & Prayers – Worship Anthology Vol.3 p.3. "Words for Worship", 299 (Arlene M. Mark, Herald Press)

- Continued page 30



- Benediction of sending ambassadors into the world
- Children's story/worship – An angel (to illustrate who the “sender” is) carries a mail bag (to illustrate bringing the message) with an envelope for each child. The envelope has two papers. Both say “I love you! Go tell someone I love them too! Love God. Each child keeps one paper and gives the other to someone else.

- Songs from Hymnal: A Worship book:

#407 We are people of God's peace.  
 #139 Far, far away from my loving father  
 #163 Obey my voice  
 #306 In Christ there is no east or west  
 #367 For the healing of the nations  
 #396 The work is thine, O Christ  
 #498 He comes to us as one unknown  
 #418 Move in our midst

### *A modern symbol*

Visual aids often help in sending a message – possibly a button or bookmark with words or a symbol could be handed out as a reminder of the churches role as ambassadors



*Ambassadors  
(continued)*

### **Sunday school & Mission Education**

Have an Ambassador month. After defining what an ambassador is, introduce a “new” ambassador each week (biblical or modern day) This could be done through drama, monologue, story telling etc. Examples of ambassadors might be: any of the prophets or disciples, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Gandhi. This could be done in a class, during a larger group opening or in a Kids club setting. Children could respond by: drawing a symbol, writing a poem or prayer, telling of an ambassador they know, collecting money for an “ambassador type” group (MCC, for example).



# 16. The Church: *Ambassadors*

II Corinthians 5:18-21

*This study was prepared by  
Lethbridge Mennonite Church  
Lethbridge, Alberta*

**A. Biblical Study**  
*Primary Biblical texts*  
II Corinthians 5:18-21  
Ephesians 6:19-20

## **Other texts**

The Greek sense of "ambassador" is "interpreter or messenger." In Hebrew the term seems to mean "angel". Other references to "messenger": Numbers 16:28; Isaiah 48:16; Jeremiah 25:4; Zechariah 2:8; 4:9; Matthew 22:31; Luke 1:19; John 1:6

## **What this image means**

Barclay suggests that it would have had a similar meaning to the Latin word "legattis", (singular) meaning envoy. An envoy would have been responsible for bringing men into the family of the Roman empire. Paul likewise would bring people into the kingdom of God. "Presbeuo" (Gk.) means to be an ambassador or envoy, travel or work as an ambassador; to be an ambassador; as an ambassador, a representative (for someone). An ambassador brings the message of Christ to the human situation.

## **Why this image was used**

In the passage II Corinthians 5:20 "we are ambassadors", does "we" refer to us as Christians or to Paul and Timothy? Our group thought that this context is specific, not to the whole Christian church. Paul and Timothy are ambassadors to the group in Corinth.

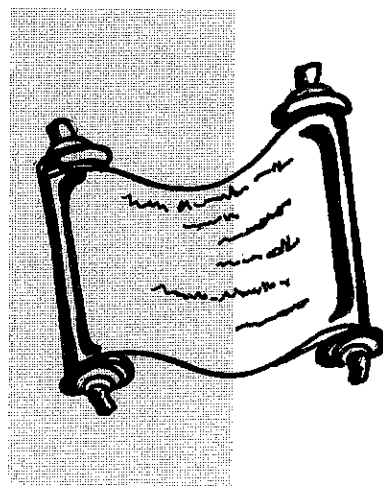
We are to be like Paul - a herald of reconciliation, to be, work or travel as ambassadors. "We who are the recipients of divine reconciliation have the privilege and obligation of now being like Paul in a sense, the heralds and instruments in God's hands to minister the message of reconciliation throughout the world." Our group would use the image "embassy" for the church rather than ambassador.

## **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

We can learn that the gospel is always the centre and includes the message of reconciliation.

## **Use in a worship service**

- Pentecost: relive Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and handing the mission over to the disciples.
- Preparation for communion: Encourage reconciliation to each other before we partake.



- Mission Week: During this time we learn how people in our community are being ambassadors of reconciliation and how we might also do so.

## **A modern symbol**

- The Canadian Bible Society (because of its global nature)
- A handshake - Passport - Bible in native language

## **In the congregations**

### **Worship**

- Exchange scripture readers with other churches during Advent.
- Incorporate symbols into ecumenical service of prayer for Christian unity.

### **Mission education**

- World Day of Prayer
- Working at the soup kitchen
- Lenten lunches are provided once/week during Lent by each of the downtown churches

### **Some Hymn ideas**

- In Christ there is no East or West
- The Work is Thine, O Christ
- The World to Christ we Bring
- We are People of God's Peace
- Unity (Sing & Rejoice)
- For the Healing of the Nations

## **Service Outline**

- Set up Stations in the church basement and Sunday School rooms to learn about missions "far away". Get your "passport" stamped at the following countries: Germany, Bangladesh, France, China, India, Japan, Chad, Russia, Tanzania (1 person at each station). The stations would include: information & food, with singing as we gather to begin and when we finish.
- Go to the missions in your own community.
- This program would begin Saturday afternoon and continue in the Sunday morning worship, where we would take conference calls during the service to/from Chad, Japan and India where some members of our congregations now reside and serve.



# 17. The Church: The poor

Luke 6:20; James 2:2-6

*This study was prepared by an Inter-generational  
coffee hour Sunday School class  
Grace Mennonite Church  
Regina, Saskatchewan*

## A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical texts

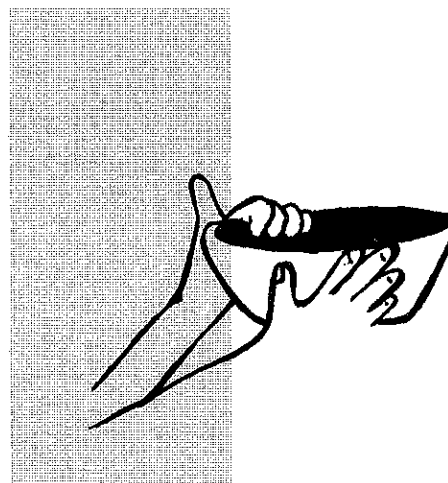
• Luke 5: 6:20; James 2:2-6

### Other texts

- Acts 9:36
- Romans 8:35
- Hebrews 11:37
- Acts 10:2
- Mark 12:42-44
- Luke 21:2-4
- 2 Corinthians 8:2-9
- Matthew 5:3
- Mark 10:46-52
- Luke 12:33-34
- Luke 14:12-13
- Luke 16:19-31
- Romans 15:1
- 1 Corinthians 1:27
- 2 Corinthians 12:9
- 1 Timothy 5:14

### What this image means

- God doesn't look down on the poor. This is a good example for the people at that time. The society was in classes with the rich on the top and the poor on the bottom. The Jewish people believed that the poor were responsible for being poor. God was rewarding them for their sins.
- When you are poor and have very little, you see more of the kingdom of heaven, as it should be here on earth. The rich are self sufficient so don't look for answers anywhere else. The belief then would have been that the rich knew more of what was required to be successful.
- When you're poor you see people as they are.
- The rich use up all their time protecting and increasing their riches.
- God gives the poor special treatment. In His eyes they have a better chance to understand and enter the kingdom of heaven.
- God uses everyone that wants to be used, the centurion, women, Romans, Jews, etc.
- Nothing can separate us from God, neither riches nor poverty.
- The poor are often persecuted or looked down on.
- The poor give out of their small possessions and give wholeheartedly. The rich give a little out of their wealth.



The attitude of the poor is to be encouraged in all Christians.

- God looks at individual giving.
- You can be poor in spirit, recognizing your need for spiritual growth and this leads to spiritual growth.
- Through faith you can do anything.
- No one is too insignificant.
- You should ask for the tangible, i.e. physical needs and the intangible, i.e. spiritual needs.
- Your possessions indicate what's important to you.
- Help those who need it.
- The family should care for members that need help.
- It is better to worry about the poor then to have nothing to do and fall into the problems caused by idleness.
- Don't ignore or stop people asking for their needs to be filled.
- God can help with any need, even financial.
- God is more important than wealth.
- You should sacrifice for the church.
- You seem to have more faith in God providing for your needs when you sacrifice to give to the church.
- The poor have ways of giving that are meaningful than the options the rich have.
- We should give the poor hope for the future.
- The church should not discriminate against the poor.
- We are asked to give wholeheartedly.
- The picture of the widow giving her alms to the church would have caused discomfort because the widows were not thought of as role models but as vulnerable and needing help, not capable of teaching others something.
- The need to stay humble.
- All people are seen as equal in God's eyes.
- We are not to judge others.
- We are to think of others not ourselves.
- Christians should encourage and build each other up—especially those having difficult times.
- Christians are to show endurance and receive encouragement and hope from the scriptures.
- We are to give hope by giving of, not only your food and drink but also of your spirit.
- God speaks to us in many ways.



### ***Why this image was used***

- God does not look at people differently.
- Each one, rich or poor, is asked to deal generously with others.
- The needs of the poor are emphasized to right a human tendency to tilt the balance to the rich.
- We can learn about right attitudes from the poor.

## **B. Communicating in the congregation**

### ***What our churches can learn***

- To walk humbly before God and with the poor.
- To help the poor.
- To work with the poor.
- To value spiritual things rather than material things.
- What does it mean to have equity between people in the work force from God's point of view.
- To feed the poor but more importantly to teach the poor how to feed themselves.

### ***Use in a worship service***

Thanksgiving: to remind us to be thankful for what we are given and to remind us to share it with the poor.

Lent: to remind us of the times we may have failed to help the poor and others.

Easter: to remind us of God's love for us and we should love others like that.

New Year: this is often a time of difficulty for the poor.

Christmas: to remind us to give to the poor.

### ***A modern symbol***

The image of the poor is very applicable today as it has been through the centuries.

## ***In the congregations***

### ***Worship***

Write a small play based on the Good Samaritan with a poor person getting hurt and lost in the city.

Do a Sunday morning on the theme of "the poor".

### ***Sunday School***

Create a banner showing the poor from our city after visiting with them and serving them a local "feed the poor" kitchen.

Raise money to buy gifts or donate gifts to a program "gifts for the poor" at Christmas.

### ***Mission Education***

Join in relief aid programs like Project "Mitch" (through MCC)

### ***Service Outline***

Volunteering at an Old Folk's home.

Bringing a program, especially singing, to Old Folk's homes.

Setting up a "Welcome Inn" type of place to meet the poor.

Invite them to church and provide transportation and friendship when they come.

Serving at "feed the poor kitchens."



## 18. The Church:

# The poor

Luke 6:20; James 2:2-6

*This study was prepared by a women's prayer coffee group & Sunday school class  
Grace Mennonite Church  
Regina, Saskatchewan*

### A. Biblical Study

#### Primary Biblical texts

- Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- not a pious hope of what is to be, but rather a blessedness that exist here and now.
- ...that joy which is completely independent of the chances and changes in this life.
- the recognition of our own helplessness and complete vulnerability and hence we put our total trust in God – we learn to practise the Presence of God.
- recognizing our need for God and knowing that we do not have to earn His love.
- Matthew 25:31-46, This is the living out of being "poor in spirit" – a natural, instinctive reaction of the loving heart. The church as poor in spirit reaches out naturally and instinctively to help the dysfunctional, the homeless, the sick, the poor,...
- Proverbs 31:9, Speaking out in the defence of the unempowered - another challenge for today's church.

#### Other texts

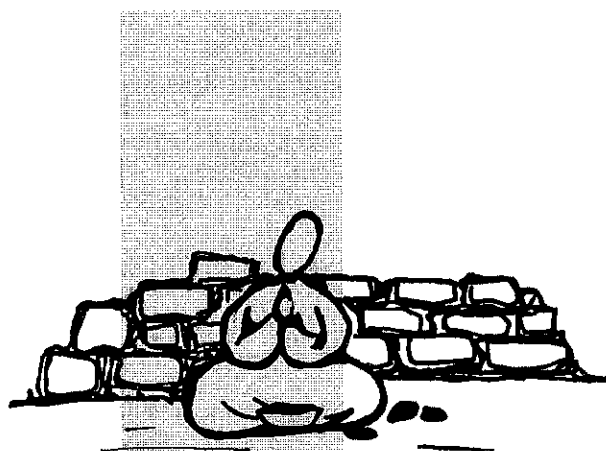
- Luke 6:20, Re-phrases Matthew 5:3
- James 2:2-6, ... justice and respect for the poor. This justice and respect are a living out of the image as poor in spirit.
- Matthew 11:5, ...good news - the poorest person inherits the riches of the love of God.
- Proverbs 14:31, Our attitudes and behaviours towards the poor are as if done to God.
- Proverbs 21:13, ...what goes around, comes around!

#### What this image means

- The Corinthian church (Greeks) understood that the completely destitute, had only God to turn to. This was a real life metaphor for them—they recognized their own helplessness and hence turned their trust to God.
- The Jewish people also had an understanding of poor which meant humble and helpless and then turned to God – not putting one's trust in one's own power. • "Blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness and who has put his whole trust in God." (Barclay)

#### Why this image was used

Clearly, this is the essence of man's reconciliation with God. This recognition of our helplessness and subsequent trust in God finds manifestation in reaching out to others, especially those that are literally poor and un-empowered.



### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### What our churches can learn

The message and saving principle of the need to be reconciled to God is still the same. We are again at a time in history where we can enjoy much leisure, but will we see that in spite of all the knowledge, skills and resources that we more than then ever need the guiding light of God in our lives? And will we have the courage, the fortitude, determination and creativity to share this "blessing" with our children who very well may not "see" it. We then are accountable to act with justice in response to the needs of people around us as well as share the reconciliation experience with them.

#### Use in a worship service

Certainly, special celebrations days and events must focus on the above two principles, but we must find new ways of communicating them—yes, the old ways as well, but also a new, today's society rhetoric and modes and models of communication. The church as poor (in spirit) is key! We cannot imagine even one sermon, or service that would not clearly refer to, reflect on and challenge with one or both tenets. Lent, Advent, etc. simply provide wonderful opportunities to "tell it" again in perhaps new and even more creative ways—with high impact.

#### A modern symbol

- a) God's hand reaching down to each of us is also a metaphor for our own expected behaviour in relationship to others. The cross tells us that Jesus is our prime example of reconciliation and the circle reflects unity.
- b) The VISION: healing and hope symbol is excellent to help remind us of and bring focus to the second principle—that of reaching out to others with justice and hope.

#### In the congregations

##### Worship

A banner / Object lesson / Drama

- Hands-on illustrations of the unequal distribution of the world's wealth. E.g. All receive a small bag and according to the country they represent, some would receive one kernel of corn to represent their wealth, while others would receive a full bag – even overflowing.
- Reader's theatre: reading a script with the attending actions.

- Continued page 35



## 19. The Church:

# Circumcision

Philippians 3:3-11

*This study was prepared by  
Tofield Mennonite Church  
Tofield, Alberta*

### A. Biblical Study

#### Primary Biblical texts

- Genesis 17:10; 21-14
- Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6
- Exodus 4:26; 12:28
- Joshua 5:2
- Jeremiah 4:4

#### Other texts

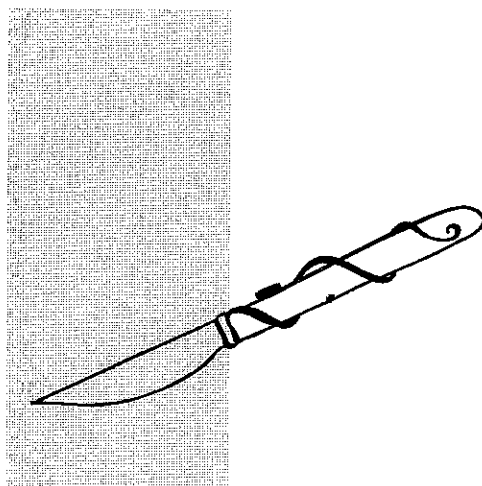
- Luke 1:59
- Romans 2:29
- Galatians 5:2; 11
- Philippians 3:3, 5
- Colossians 2:11
- Titus 1:10

#### What this image means

Showed them they were different—took pride in the fact that they (the Jews) were unique, cleansing/purification.

#### Why this image was used

Chosen of God—spiritually pure.



### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### What our churches can learn

That they are chosen; preserved.

#### Use in a worship service

Lent: because it is traditionally a time of spiritual renewal.  
Not entirely appropriate to use at other main events, because of too many other symbols at other holidays.

#### A modern symbol

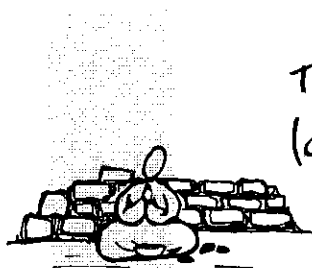
Servanthood/pure—footwashing—water and towel.

#### In the congregations

Sermon on being chosen of God and how we can serve.

#### Mission education

One avenue of servitude/mission work and the calling it entails.



## The Poor (continued)

#### Sunday School

- Story telling of reconciliation examples drawing on Biblical examples as well as current examples.
- Projects of giving that challenge.

#### Service Outline

Introduction of theme "Poor in Spirit": those who have realized that only by God's grace are we able to live a full life and be blessed.

Song: "Amazing Grace"

Reading: maybe something like the story of how "Amazing Grace" was written by John Newton.

Song: "Marvelous Grace of our Loving Lord."

Reader's Theatre: Matthew 5:3 & Matthew 25:31-46

Song: "My hope is built on nothing less."

Closing: Go and live in the grace of God, knowing that you are blessed.



## 20. The Church:

# House of David

Acts 15:16-18

*This study was prepared by  
Wellspring Christian Fellowship  
Abbotsford, British Columbia*

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary Biblical texts*

- Acts 15:16-18, (cf Amos 9: 11-12)
- 2 Samuel 6:17, Tent & tabernacle David used to house ark of covenant
- Romans 9:24-6, (of Hosea 2: 23) Gentiles included with Jesus as God's people
- Romans 3:28-30; 10:12, no distinction between Jew & Gentile in regards to salvation

#### *Other texts*

- Matthew 1:1
- Romans 1: 3
- Revelation 22:16, Messianic geneology linking David to Christ
- Jer. 33:14-16, restoration of Jews (David's lineage).

#### *What this image means*

James is addressing the Jerusalem council. Historically, David's tent/tabernacle referred to a literal tent pitched to house the Ark of the Covenant—meeting place between God and man. Council now recognizing this "restoration" to include Gentiles, interpreting it spiritually, as Old Testament prophetic fulfillment. Further, it would definitely carry 'covenantal' overtones.

For Gentiles, this meant familial inclusion minus encumbrances (e.g. circumcision) associated with the Law. For Judaizers, it served as a polemic against legalism (see Acts 15:1-2)

#### *Why this image was used*

It would be unmistakably clear to Council. Jews, versed in Old Testament prophecy, who, in their dealings with the primitive church, needed this type of impetus to motivate/confirm relationship(s) with 'Gentiles'. "Tent" represents an invitation to meet with God.

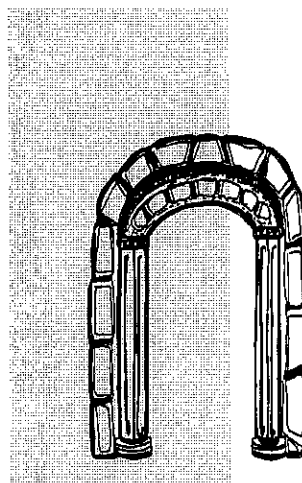
### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

- God desires to restore relationship with all people(s).
- God takes initiative towards reconciliation (vs. 17).
- God's form of relationship is 'covenantal'.
- God uses the past (Old Testament) to teach about present & future.

#### *Use in a worship service*

This image is difficult to use as an image for an entire



service or as any kind of focus in a service. Probably, it is most appropriate as an illustration or fitting into a larger discussion.

#### *A modern symbol*

The idea is the restoration of something lost, or damaged beyond repair. Rebuilding a condemned heritage home could be one picture. Also, finding a close relative (brother, sister) that you had lost contact with and presumed to be dead.

#### *In the congregations*

##### *Worship*

During a theme of evangelism; the image of an utterly ruined house, lovingly restored and repaired piece by piece. The owner labours diligently, but can think of nothing else than a beautifully restored home as the finished product.

##### *Mission education*

No one is outside of the Lord's reach. Even the "despised" Gentiles were seen to be receiving God's grace and His Spirit. What a motivation for evangelism!

#### *Service Outline*

To base an entire service on this image would not be very easy to do.



# 21. The Church: Remnant

Romans 9:27; 11:5-7

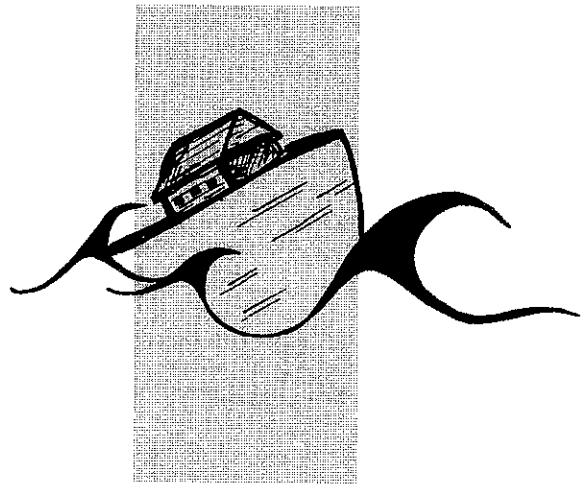
*This study was prepared by  
South Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church  
Calgary, Alberta*

## A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical texts

- Genesis 45:7
- Genesis 7:23b, "He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark."
- The flood story of Noah and the animals and his family is the first explicit reference to the remnant motif in the Hebrew scriptures. Creation that was deemed good and right is, through the willfulness and wickedness of the people, threatened with annihilation. The texts describe a grieving God, a God ready to blot out a world gone wrong; a world full of corruption and violence. Yet, God displays mercy with the saving of a remnant (Noah, his family and some animals). In this instance Noah is described as righteous, meaning someone who stood in relationship to God. This remnant will become the New Hope of a new beginning, even though it appears at first glance to be a gloomy proposition, a meager and woefully inadequate group confined in a smelly ark.

Still it is this remnant that points to the future. God wishes to save and restore, not destroy. Other references to remnant can be found in the stories of Abraham and Lot (Genesis 18), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25), Jacob and Esau and the story of Joseph. Here (Genesis 45:7) Joseph says to his brothers "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors." Preserving life even in the face of grave deceit and treachery is paramount. Joseph is a *mihyah* (Genesis 45:5) i.e. a "remnant", "a place where life is to be found..." (158, Hasel). This "life", amazingly, has its foundation in a painful story of brokenness between members of one family. Within this panorama of hostility and grief God is mysteriously present. God's grace provides healing. Broken relationships can be restored; life is preserved.

- Genesis 19:24-25
- Amos 5:4-6; 9:7-12, The prophetic literature - Amos



- "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? Says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir? The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth-except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord. For lo, I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble will fall to the ground. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, "Evil shall not overtake or meet us." On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this." (9:7-12)
- For the purposes of this study we will use Amos as an example of the extent to which the remnant motif is present within the prophetic literature. Amos (9:7-12 quoted in Acts 15:17) challenges the idea that Israel as remnant has an advantage over others because of her special status in God's eyes. Amos challenges the notion that Israel can hide behind her "divine election" no matter what. Israel's reliance on military prowess, her wealth, and her showy piety are all severely criticized.

To illustrate how bad things might get Amos uses the following example: "Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued..." (3:12). This is an interesting image of remnant; bits and pieces of a body, torn and bruised. These "rescued" pieces from the mouth of the lion indicate that a much larger whole has been lost.

This image points to the sobering idea that the "bits and pieces" of Israel (albeit the rescued remnant) cannot save the whole of Israel as a nation. Amos points again and again to the false hope Israel placed in the notion of being a remnant with special status. He

- Continued page 38



does so to warn them of what the consequences of their wilful behaviour will be and to call the people back to God; to reform their ways. He calls them to “seek” and “live” (Amos 5:4-6) and to “establish justice in the gate” (social justice) (Amos 5:15). Based on the fulfillment of these conditions, “it may be that ... God will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:15). Those who turn to God will be saved. Likely, it will be a “remnant” of the remnant that will be ultimately saved.



## Remnant (continued)

- Isaiah carries forward many images of remnant from the Hebrew tradition. Following are some examples of images that are used to describe remnant.
- Isaiah 6:11-13 “Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump. This image alludes to the idea that it is possible for a remnant to arise from a remnant. The remnant is always in danger of being extinguished, either through natural disasters, or through faithlessness. The hope is that new life will form even from that which appears to be dead or destroyed. This image points to the ever-present theme within the remnant of judgement and hope. The remnant motif embodies this bi-polarity of doom and salvation. Isaiah brings faith into the picture when speaking about the remnant. Faith in God is the defining feature of the remnant. Without faith there will be no life.
- Isaiah 10:20-23 “On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God: For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in all the earth.” “Holy seed”, stumps of trees, “sand of the sea”, “purifying fire” are all images used by Isaiah to refer to remnant.
- Romans 9:27; 11:5-7
- And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved...” (9:27)
- So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, “God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see, and ears that would not hear, down to

this very day.” (11:5-7)

- Paul uses the remnant motif in Romans. In clarifying to the Romans what he understands the remnant to be Paul quotes the Hebrew Scriptures:
- Hosea 2:23, Isaiah 10:20-23 and 1 Kings 19:18. In the story of Elijah where Elijah pleads with God against Israel, the divine voice responds to him, ‘I have left myself seven thousand men who have not knelt to Baal.’ Paul states, ‘In just the same way at the present time a remnant has come into being, selected by the grace of God. —It does not rest on deeds done.’ Faith is the defining feature of the remnant for Paul as well, as it had been for Isaiah.

The remnant in Romans refers to the Jews and Gentiles who have attained righteousness based on faith in Jesus Christ. No one earns or deserves it, since all have sinned. Those who believe and have faith, however, receive God’s gift of grace. Faith opens the way to reconciliation with God. Paul held that divine grace and grateful faith effect moral renewal. The theme of judgment and hope within the remnant runs through Paul’s discourse. Israel made a great effort after a law of righteousness, but never attained it because their efforts were not based on faith, but on deeds. The law told them what to do, but did not give them the power to do it. As a consequence, Israel lost its position as part of God’s people. They assumed their special status would save them. Paul warns Christians not to become arrogant, judgmental and overconfident. Paul expresses hope that the Gentile’s joyful acceptance of the gift of God’s grace will be an example and stimulus to the people (Israel) to return to God.

### *Why this image was used*

The gospel message as we understand it, is that the church is for everyone. The defining feature is not whether one belongs to a particular family, or a particular nationality, or even whether one belongs to a particular denomination. The defining feature is faith and a turning toward God. It is being attentive to God. Hearts that once were hardened are now softened, eyes are opened, ears hear. The image of church as remnant points to that place “where life is to be found.”

The church as remnant is a place of renewal. Where life is cherished and honored. Where there is a place for repentance and a change of heart and direction. It is a place where one can seek “good.” It is a place where one can learn to live life to its fullest potential.



The church as remnant is a place of regeneration. The possibility of new life from the burnt stumps of our lives offers the hope that a new whole will emerge where once there were only bruised and torn pieces. Where the pain and gloom of life can receive some healing balm. Where visions of tender, green, vigorous shoots of life are nurtured. Shoots that offer the promise of a new reality, perhaps even a new beginning.

The church as remnant is a place of restoration. It is a place that offers hope in the face of destruction and the bitter ironies of life.

It is a place where one can "establish justice at the gate". Work toward social justice is of paramount importance in the life of this kind of church. This church will strive to exude a vital spirit, eyes that see, ears that hear and hearts that are open to the mystery that is God.

Faith in God is the foundation of the "remnant" church. The image of remnant reminds us that in some ways the existence of the church is tenuous; the refiners fire is brutal, grains of sand can easily be blown away, grafting does not always work. The church is not immune from distortions of false security or attitudes of superiority.

Remnant reminds us that our salvation lies not in our outward expressions of piety, or in our wealth and consumerism, or in our political affiliations, and probably also not in our good works. Our salvation rests on God's gift of grace and mercy, images of hope that sustain this fragile and sometimes vulnerable group.

## **B. Communicating in the congregation**

### ***Service Outline***

We feel that this image can be used in a worship service anytime. There are many scriptural images one could use to illustrate remnant (see above). The modern symbol that we would choose and believe could be used to teach the meaning of this image is the patchwork quilt, a new whole created from bits and pieces of torn cloth and remnants. This could be the visual symbol for the worship service.

Call to worship: (based on Psalm 36: 5-7)

Leader: Your steadfast love, O God, extends to the heavens,

Congregation: your faithfulness to the clouds.

Leader: Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains

Congregation: Your judgements are like the great deep.

Leader: You save humans and animals alike,

Congregation: How precious is your steadfast love, O God.

All: All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

### **Lament and ritual:**

There are many apt symbols of the remnant motif, but we have chosen a literal one, that of cloth. We suggest that a visual symbol for this service be a patchwork quilt, created from many remnants being sewn together.

The following lament and ritual (adapted from Joy is our Banquet by Keri Wehlander) speak to the ways remnants

are formed in the tearing of community. Use a cloth that tears easily for this ritual. Those persons reading the petitions will rip a strip from the cloth and hold it until the lament is finished.

### **A Lament:**

Voice 1: Sorrowing God, Healing God. Note the pitch of our grief.

See the depth of our loss.

The fabric of our life has been ripped. The wrenching sound of ripping apart.

The stirring sight of threads, unraveling. Pains deep within our hearts.

God of grieving, God of mending. Bend your ear to the voice of our grief.

Voice 2: The voices of those broken by natural disaster cry out

(a strip is torn)

Voice 3: The voices of those suffering from injustice cry out

(a strip is torn)

Voice 4: The voices of those shattered by betrayal cry out!

(a strip is torn)

Voice 5: The voices of those burdened by oppression cry out!

(a strip is torn)

Voice 6: The voices of those annihilated from war cry out!

(a strip is torn)

Voice 7: The voices of those aching from violence cry out!

(a strip is torn)

Voice 8: The voices of those ravaged by disease cry out!

(a strip is torn)

All: The fabric of our life is torn. Only a remnant remains.

Voice 1: Preserving, mending, rescuing, ever faithful God. We are all fragile and vulnerable. We live by the gifts of your grace and your mercy. May our lives mirror your faithfulness to us, Holy and steadfast One.

### **Cloth of lament and restoration:**

As the following song is sung, those who read petitions and tore strips (above) from the cloth are invited to attach the strips on a larger cloth of a contrasting color, creating a cloth of lament and restoration.

Song: "Out of the depths, I cry to you" (133 HW) or Kyrie Eleison (144, 152 HW)

### **Blessing:**

May God's healing presence mend our hearts,  
Renewing and regenerating us  
Restoring us in faithfulness,  
and "establishing justice within our gates." Amen.

### **A Psalm for the Displaced:**

God, our promised land;  
Christ, our way;  
Our journey has become long and hard  
Because we wander about like nomads  
Not knowing where to go.  
We are strangers in our own land,  
Without bread, a roof, a future.  
But you came to find us

- Continued page 40



with your life-giving breath.  
You, who was also displaced,  
have become an exile with us.  
You offer us anew the promised land.  
Your spirit urges us toward  
that joyous homecoming.

From p. 99, *On Frequent Journeys*, Worship Resources on Uprooted Peoples, 1997, UCPH, Toronto. This resource has other material appropriate to this theme.

**Suggested children's story:**

Something from Nothing, by Phoebe Gilman. This is a Jewish folktale about a young boy named Joseph. Joseph has a favorite blanket (given to him by his grandfather) that is now in tatters. This story tells how grandfather who can fix anything "restores" Joseph's blanket even though his mother cries, "throw it out!" Is it possible to make something out of nothing?

**Suggested hymns for worship**

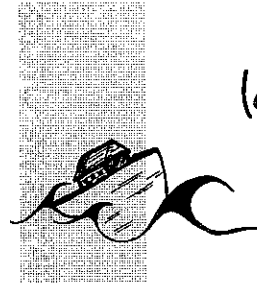
Gathering: Blessed Jesus at your word #13 HW  
Breathe upon us, Holy Spirit #28 HW

Praising: I will praise the Lord #109  
O praise the gracious power #111 HW

Confessing/Reconciling: Out of the depths I cry to you #133 HW

Covenant: We give thanks unto you #161 HW

Proclaiming: For we are strangers no more #322 HW



Remnant  
(continued)

Praying: Help us to help each other #362 HW  
O God, thou faithful God #376 HW  
Guide me, O thou great Jehovah #582 HW  
My Shepherd will supply my need #589 HW

**Sources used in compiling this study:**

Floyd V. Filson, *A New Testament History* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1964)  
*Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Hosea/Amos, Genesis)  
Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the remnant idea from Genesis to Isaiah*. (Andrews University Press: Michigan, 1974)  
George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (W. B. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1974)  
*Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, reprinted 1975  
The Interpreter's Bible  
Keri K. Wehlender, *Joy is our Banquet* (United Church Publishing House: Etobicoke, 1996)  
*On Frequent Journeys, Worship Resources on Uprooted Peoples*, 1997, UCPH, Toronto.



## 22. The Church: *Rule of the Lamb*

Revelations 2:26-27

*This study was prepared by  
Hanley Mennonite Church  
Hanley, Saskatchewan*

### A. Biblical Study

#### **Primary Biblical texts**

- Revelations 2:26-27 which is part of the larger unit
- Revelations 2:18-19
- Revelations 5:11-14

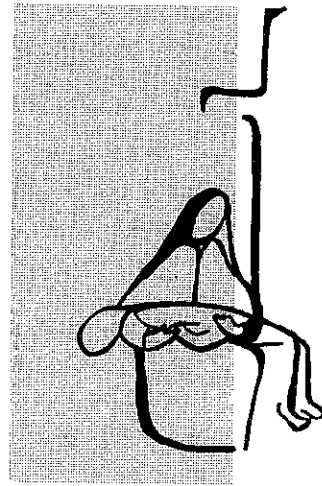
#### **Other texts**

- Rev. 5:1-14, Jesus Christ is described as the Lamb who is able to open the scroll with its seven seals.
- John 1:29 & 36, John the Baptist declares Jesus as the Lamb of God.
- Psalm 2:9, the enemies of the Lord will be destroyed. This verse is quoted and re-interpreted in Rev. 2:27.
- Matthew 28:18, all authority on heaven and earth has been given to Jesus.
- Hebrews 3:5-6, Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. We are his house.
- 1 Cor. 1:24, God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.
- 2 Peter 1:19, reference is made to the hope elicited by the prophetic message that the morning star represents.
- John 21:15-19, Jesus commands Simon Peter to look after and feed his sheep representing followers of Jesus.
- There are also many other references to Jesus as the Lamb found in the Revelation.

#### **What this image means**

The image of the lamb who rules is one which was meant to encourage and challenge the church at Thyatira to remain steadfast against the temptations which they faced. The people were encouraged not to be overcome with temptations to follow the pagan gods which is represented by "Jezebel" (1 Kings 16:31-33). Those who remain faithful can look forward with the Psalmist (Ps. 2:9 quoted in Rev. 2:26b-27) to the day when God's Messiah would "smash" all resistance to God's kingly rule and assume "authority over the nations."

John, the receiver of "the Revelation" sees this ancient hope transformed in the light of the cross. Pagan resistance will indeed be smashed, but God will use no other "iron rod" than the death of his own Son, "the Lamb" and the martyrdom of the saints. The verses are a reminder that the way of enduring is important. Jesus, the Lamb, is the one whom is followed. The verses are also an encouragement. The "morning star" used in the concluding verse of the letter is symbolic of the promise of resurrection. More background material can be found in *Triumph of the Lamb*



by Ted Grimsrud (Herald Press: Scottdale, Pennsylvania) and *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible* by Vernard Eller (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan).

#### **Why this image was used**

John uses this image to give encouragement to the people to live faithfully despite the temptations they face. They were to follow Jesus in the way that he lived his life—as a lamb. In this way, God would ultimately triumph over evil. The triumph will be due to the death of the lamb and the martyrdom of the saints. Power and authority has been entrusted to the church. It is important for the church to use these faithfully despite opposition and persecution.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### **What our churches can learn**

This image can be a reminder for us to be like lambs, ie, to embrace and develop the characteristics of trustworthiness, meekness, and pacifism. It can be a challenge for us to live a life of service and speak for the powerless in the world. It is a challenge to us to use the authority and power we have been given faithfully.

#### **Use in a worship service**

A very appropriate time would be the Lenten season since much of the focus is upon Jesus' sacrificial death. The communion service would also lend itself to its use. Another appropriate time would be during mission emphasis services because of its encouragement for service.

#### **A modern symbol**

We had difficulty thinking of modern images that would correspond to "Lambs who rule". The following were suggested:

- a) "Gathering for worship": The act of coming together for worship can point to the hope that we are called to hold onto the truth, ie. that Jesus is the lamb and thus we have the hope of resurrection.
- b) The poor and insignificant people can also help us to see God at work in this world.

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## Worship

There are many hymns which focus upon Jesus as the Lamb. Handel's Messiah containing the chorus "Worthy is the Lamb" (Rev. 5:12) would be appropriate. Other hymns are listed below:

Mennonite Hymnal

#109 Behold the glories of the lamb

#202 O, wherefore do the nations rage

Hymnal Worship Book

#67 Sing Hallelujah, Praise the Lord

#108 Blessing and honour and glory

#116 Crown Him with many crowns

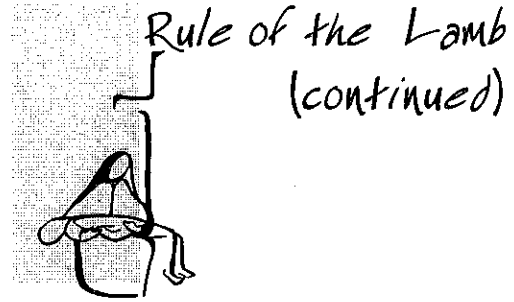
#188 Sleepers, wake! (Advent song proclaiming the star is risen)

#476 This is the feast of victory (communion hymn)

It may be meaningful to incorporate those with little power to communicate the message that God's victory over evil is through the lamb. This would take some skillful development. A display could be set up which would include a cross, the Bible as the word, a rod, a shattered jar, and a lamb as a sacrifice. A banner which would hold together the symbol of authority "the lamb who rules" with that of service "the basin with a towel" may be quite meaningful.

## Sunday School

A curriculum could be written which would explore the letter to the church at Thyatira as we have it in Revelation 2. Time would be spent on learning the cultural context in which the people lived including the work they did, the culture that surrounded them, the problems and persecution they experienced. It would also be helpful to explore the symbols that are used and referred to in this letter including: Jezebel, lamb, rod, shattered jar, morning star.



It would be beneficial to connect the concept of Jesus as the Lamb and the church as the Lamb in which its members are called to live faithfully.

## Service Outline

Hymns of Praise, #67 (HWB) Sing hallelujah, praise the Lord

#116 (HWB) Crown him with many crowns

Prayer

Children's story: "The Lion and the Dove" from I Have Heard Good News Today by Corneilia Lehn

Scripture reading: John 1: 24-34, Revelation 2: 26-27, Revelation 5:1-10

Responsive reading #689 (HWB) [this reading is a conclusion to Rev. 5:1-10]

Choir: "Worthy is the Lamb" from Handel's Messiah

Sermon: "Lambs who rule"

Hymn of Response #109 (MH) Behold the glories of the Lamb

Closing prayer and benediction

Closing hymn #426 Abide, O dearest Jesus



## 23. The Church: Holy City

Galatians 4:21-31; Revelation 11:8;  
Hebrews 12

*This study was prepared by  
Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Morden  
Morden, Manitoba.*

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary biblical texts*

- Galatians 4:21-31
- Hebrews 12:22-23
- Revelation 4:8; 6:10; 11:8-11

#### *Other texts*

- Psalm 48:2-3, God's dwelling place
- I Kings 6:14-22, City is holy in the priestly sense
- Nehemiah 11:1, Jerusalem as Holy city – dwellers are blessed
- Daniel 9:16, city as a reproach to sin
- Joel 3:17, city of refuge and safety

#### *What this image means*

For the Jewish people it meant God's reign and dwelling.  
For the Gentiles it meant that the knowledge of God could be known and experienced while God was worshipped.  
For the Corinthians it was a reminder that the church stood in sharp contrast to a city in which they lived. The call was to purity and righteous living.  
For all the challenge is to live as God's redeemed, where God is honored as King.

#### *Why this image was used*

This image was used because it expresses that a people called by God are a redeemed people who are to live lives of peace, joy, love and grace. Within this city is safety, holiness and strength to live.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

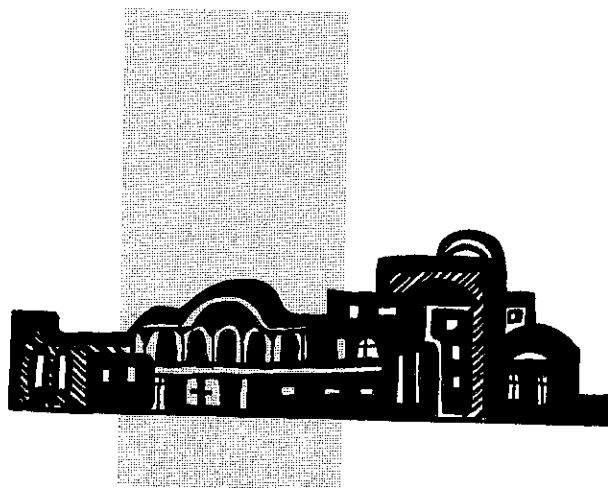
- The church is in sharp contrast to the world
- God's holiness is supreme and reigns forever
- That there is refuge for all to seek this dwelling
- That this is "community" life at its best

Use in a worship service

The Holy city would be best used in a Lenten service. Christ's death (outside the city wall), and resurrection (new life) ushers in a new covenant and established the city of God.

#### *A modern symbol*

The cross in the midst of a stained glass window which would depict the "holiness" of God's world in the midst of difficult and troubling times.



### *In the congregations*

#### **Worship**

Banner: which expresses the faces of people around the world

Worship Table: could represent the variety of gifts/talents used by people to live as God's redeemed.

#### **Sunday School**

Children could be invited to make a collage of pictures representing God's "holy city." How does this differ from what we see on TV or experience in life?

#### **Mission Education**

Display various mission agencies showing the work being done around the globe. Specific places could be elaborated upon and work reported as to how the Gospel of Christ is being shared.

### *Service Outline*

#### *Gathering:*

Call to worship

Songs of Praise and Adoration

Prayers of thankfulness (invitation to come into God's presence)

Scripture Reading: (use one or more of the outlined texts)

Hymn

Children's Story (a story where MCC is helping or assistance is being given to people)

Dramatic Readers Theatre – Galatians 4:21-31

Reflections – by persons in the church who have experienced the church as a place of refuge and healing through a recent crisis or struggle)

Hymn of Prayer

Sermon (attention given to visuals on worship table)

*The Community of faith responds:*

Litany of Affirmation - #711 (HWB)

Passing the Peace – a blessing is shared with one another

Hymn of Affirmation

*Sending:*

Prayer of Blessing

Closing Hymn of Joy



## 24. The Church:

# Priesthood

I Peter 2:9; Revelations 1:6; 5:10

*This study was prepared by  
Mississauga Mennonite Fellowship  
Mississauga, Ontario*

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary Biblical Texts*

- I Peter 2:4-10, we are called to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood
- Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10, Jesus as our high priest and the function of the high priest
- Revelation 1:4-6; 5:10, Christ made us priests serving his God and Father

#### *Other texts*

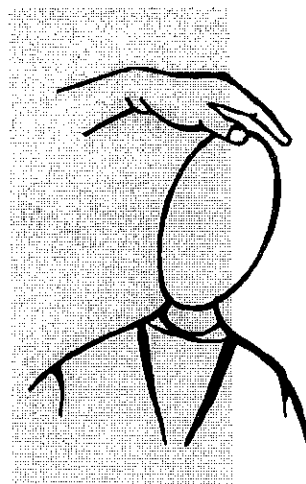
- Exodus 19:6, Israel as a holy nation, a priestly kingdom
- Isaiah 61:5,6, you shall be called priests of the Lord
- Isaiah 66:20,21, bring people from all nations and some of them will be taken as Priests and Levites

#### *What this image means*

The image of priesthood for Jewish readers would have had a direct connection to the priesthood in the Old Testament that was part of the religious structure of the tabernacle and the temple. Priests were part of the structure of Jewish religion that aided in worship, sacrifices, etc. There was the chief priest or high priest (Exodus 8:28, 29 and Leviticus 8) Aaron, for example, who was allowed to enter the holy of holies in the temple. The tribe of levites were designated as priests early on, but the term “levites” also came to mean anyone dedicating themselves to Yahweh who didn’t necessarily come from that tribe, for example, Samuel. The priests and the chief priests were consecrated mediators between God and people, who did sacrifices, worship, prayer and teaching. The images of priesthood takes on the idea of performing priestly services, with Jesus as high priest (Hebrews 6:20). So the followers of Christ are called to be a priesthood by faith (Hebrews 11) like the Levites.

#### *Why this image was used*

Priesthood was a significant image of the church because to Jewish Christians it was a familiar image that had a very significant role in their previous relationship with God. So, redefining a familiar term is a practical way to picture, how through Jesus, their way of relating to God had changed. As well, to use the image of priesthood also roots the readers in the progression of revelation from the Old Testament definition of priesthood to a new redefined term through Jesus. The redefinition opens wide the revelation for all people (Revelation 1:4-6).



### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

We as Christians are called to be “priests” dedicated, accountable “ministers” actively using our gifts to enrich each other and spread the gospel. We are all called to worship, prayer and teaching. To be a priesthood implies that we are made up of many roles and gifts and all are just as important as any one single person or gift (Ephesians 4:11). Why don’t we live like a “priesthood?” We are fearful and timid (2 Timothy 1:3-7) or possibly expect it is someone else’s gift or role, not ours.

#### *Use in a worship service*

- covenant or membership renewal as a reminder of commitment to the faith
- baptism as a reminder of our life long dedication to live for Christ with our whole self
- outreach focused service as a reminder of our call to actively use our gifts for the spread of the gospel

#### *A modern symbol*

- puzzle: everyone pick up a piece and put together a puzzle to help visualize the connectedness and gifts of the church
- stones or blocks: have everyone get a stone or block in order to build a structure or foundation with each piece representing a person that contributes to the church
- candles: everyone gets a candle to light from a central one because we each have a light to shine

#### *In the congregations*

##### *Worship*

A litany of commitment to use our ministry and gifts to their full potential for each other and the community.  
#713(HWB)

##### *Songs*

#304 (HWB) There are many gifts but the same spirit  
#365 (HWB) Christ from whom all blessings flow

##### *Sunday School*

Have the group write down 3 gifts they feel God has or will give them, and to share this with the rest of the group. Then in some way have them pledge these gifts to God and the church publicly.

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## 25. The Church:

# First Fruits

Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15

*This study was prepared by  
First Mennonite Church  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

### A. Biblical Study

#### **Primary Biblical texts**

- 1 Corinthians 16:15, first converts
- Romans 16:5, first converts
- Revelation 14:4, believers in Jesus Christ
- Deut. 26:1-11, law of tithe of first fruits as identifying self as inheritor of the promise of Abraham, and Jehovah as God.

#### **Other texts**

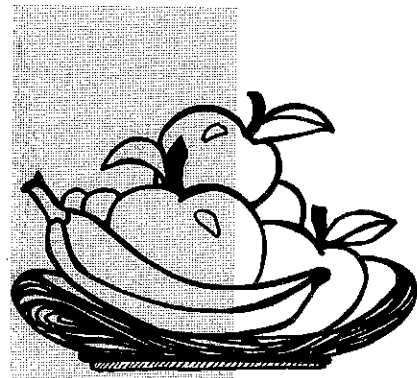
- Romans 8:23, symbolic of the foretaste of all the Spirit has for believers now and time to come.
- Romans 11:11-24, figurative of Israel's position
- 1 Cor. 15:20-23, symbolic of Christ's position in the resurrection
- James 1:18, symbolic of human believers [as contrasted with angels for example]
- Ex. 23:16-19, first fruits to be tithed
- Ex. 34:22-27, first fruits to be brought to God's house
- Lev. 23:9-14, law concerning first fruits
- Num. 28:26, method of presenting first fruits
- Neh. 10:35-39, example of tithing first fruits
- Proverbs 3:9, God is honoured by first fruits
- Ezek. 20:39-44, first fruits are considered holy, reflecting God's acceptance of Israel.

#### **What this image means**

The Testament Israelites were basically as an agricultural people, well aware of what wind, heat and drought could do to crops. Therefore, when the first harvest came off the field, in recognition of their dependence upon God, in accordance to the laws given by JHWH, and mostly as symbolizing them as the covenant people of God and heirs of Abraham's promise, they offered to Him the first fruits of the harvest.

In the New Testament, while agriculture was still very important, it was rather the understanding of the significance of the Old Testament injunction that captured Jewish thoughts. When Paul and John wrote of the church as the "first fruits", it would have been understood in the context of the Old Testament by faithful Jews.

However, for the Gentiles who lacked the Old Testament understanding, and for whom this was not part of their heritage or background, the concept of offering their best to the Deity would have been an easy focus. The idea of an offering having been given completely was easy to



understand. That they as members of the church of Jesus Christ should have been called first fruits would have been a powerful image suggesting a total giving to their new God. They would have understood themselves to be following Christ Who was/is the first fruits of those who have gained eternal life.

#### **Why this image was used**

The first fruits first of all seem to suggest that we are to give our tithe before anything else, from the blessings, specifically from that which God allows us to produce to meet our needs. "I shall seek your choicest of your gifts." Ezekiel 20:40. The first fruits not only includes our tithes, but all aspects of life: the first fruits of our resurrection life, that we can eliminate (put to death) the things of the flesh, our sinful nature, remembering that Christ was the first one to experience resurrection from the dead; the first fruits of the Spirit, that we may know who we are and who He is, that we might know His will; that we may be conformed to the likeness of Christ, who is the First Fruit (first born) among us. We need to put Christ first.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### **What our churches can learn**

#### **Use in a worship service**

- New Year's Service: to present ourselves as a church body as first fruits at the beginning of the new year and in the coming year to thank and praise God for the people He will bring to us as a church—as first fruits.
- Mission Week: to hear from and of, to pray for, and to participate in the life of new converts locally and around the globe.
- Lent: we have the cross as the key symbol—as a sign of Christ's sacrificial death and our eternal life. We continue to be first fruits because of Calvary.
- Thanksgiving: people seem to understand the importance of giving, and especially so at a particular time of year when we celebrate all that we have been given throughout the year. At such a time we remember and give of our best.
- Communion: Inasmuch as Christ's life, death and resurrection are symbolized in the elements of communion, we partake of these elements as symbolic of the first fruits of Christ's great sacrifice on our behalf.

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### ***A modern symbol***

During communion, with hands reaching out and palms up, filled with grapes and bread, present them to God/your neighbour/into a basket for the local food bank that day/ as part of a love-feast during or right after the service, etc. This is symbolic of Christ welcoming us to come and eat at His table as we also invite others to join us.

Actual fruit, for e.g. glossy, perfect apple: flesh which is pure and white symbolizes purity seeds portray resurrection, etc.

### **Worship**

Sermon on first fruits

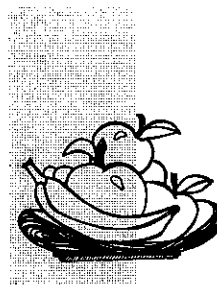
songs: #392 (WB) Heart and mind, possessions, Lord,  
#309 (WB) Built on the Rock,  
# 96 (WB) We plow the fields and scatter  
worship resources (WB) #669, #706, #717

### **Sunday School**

Make hands: large hands reaching out—have children trace their hands and place them on the larger hands as if holding it and one of them reaching out.

### **Mission education**

Songs and banners.



## *First Fruits (continued)*

### ***Service Outline***

Call to worship #717

Hymn #392

Prayer #744

Offering

Communion

Sermon: Romans 16:5, 1 Cor. 16:15

Hymn #76

Closing #761

Scripture Reading

Congregational Song

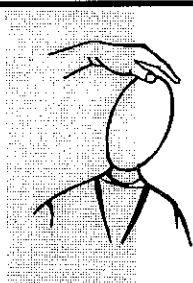
Meditation

Prayer

Testimony or time of sharing God's blessings

Song

Closing



## *Priesthood (continued)*

### **Mission Education**

Use the scripture readings to reflect on and then write a statement of commitment or a mission statement.

### ***Service Outline***

Prior to the service, have everyone pick a child's building block that somehow represents them (in shape or color).

Call to worship: Exodus 19:3-6 – Israel as a priestly nation

Song: #6 (HWP) Here in this place

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Song: #8 (HWP) Brethren, we have met to worship

Symbol: Have everyone come forward to connect their block to everyone else's (end result will be a structure or path made up of all the blocks.) Explain and reflect on its unique, diverse connection and how it is like the church.

Litany of commitment to be a priesthood of believers for Christ: #713 (HWP)

Song: #304 (HWP) There are many gifts

Scripture/sermon focus: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Closing Song: #357 (HWP) O Master let me walk with thee

Sending: Revelation 1:4b-6



## 26. The Church: *Aroma*

11 Corinthians 2:14-16

*This study was prepared by  
Grace Mennonite Church  
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan*

### **A. Biblical Study** *Primary Biblical Text*

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

#### **Other Texts**

- Genesis 8:20, the aroma of Noah's sacrifice was pleasing to God, who promised never again to destroy all living creatures
- Exodus 29:18, 25, the sacrificial burning of a ram is a pleasing aroma to the Lord
- Ezekiel 20:41, the Lord promises to gather the scattered people of Israel, and their coming together will be a fragrant incense
- Ephesians 5:2, Christ gave himself as a fragrant offering

#### **What this image means**

The image of "aroma" seems to have been used primarily to talk to the Israelite people, and was probably tied to the Old Testament practices of burnt offerings, a smell that "was pleasing to God." Thus, when the writers of the New Testament (Paul) used this language, it would have evoked memories of other times and other smells, and the sense of assurance that they were in fact God's people, and that God continued to hold them in his favour. The passage from 2 Corinthians then, was an invitation to be that aroma, and to spread that aroma to others, and while some would experience it as the "smell of death," others would find it be the "fragrance of life."

#### **Why this image was used**

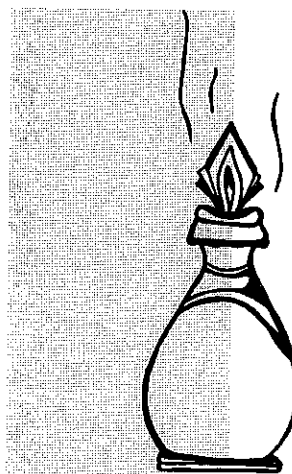
Remember that this is an "earthier" time, and that the smells of every facet of everyday life would be much more intrusive than we experience today. Aromas would offer messages, of assurance, of concern, of safety, of danger. This would have been a rich and meaningful metaphor for the church that spoke of "permeation" a presence that was everywhere, that could not be escaped.

### **B. Communicating in the congregation** *What our churches can learn*

Today, we can also understand "aroma" as permeating a given space, it can't be avoided. An "aroma" appeals to another sense, that we haven't always given much credit to, but that can somehow transport us to another time and place, a safe childhood memory, for instance.

#### **When this image can be used**

At Thanksgiving when we think of the usual display of "bounteousness" we are reminded of the generosity of God, the smell of baking bread could add to that. At an



Eternity service, remembering loved ones who have died. The aroma of scented candles might be an encouragement of spirits being joined together with Christ.

#### **A modern symbol**

- A cup of coffee with the aroma wafting skyward, brings to mind community, friendship and sharing.
- A bottle of perfume, using the theme of Mary, anointing Jesus feet with expensive fragrance, a message of humility and service.

#### **Worship**

Scented candles could be used to symbolize our "togetherness" in Christ. A visual symbol of the coffee cup could speak of warmth and community. A "bread baking" aroma might be meaningful during a communion service.

#### **Sunday School**

A Sunday school class could do some baking, cookies, etc. to offer to the adults in church, and then be led through a discussion of the smell of baking, and the memories released by those aromas.

#### **Mission Education**

The smell of wood smoke (without burning down the church) could lead to stories of wiener roasts, and inviting others to share an outdoor experience, and inviting them into a spiritual relationship.

#### **Service Outline**

Using actual aromas or fragrances indoors might be difficult due to allergies, etc. However, symbols could be used - perhaps the symbol of the shared cup of coffee, the jar of fragrance. Songs could relate to the created world, which implies the aromas of that world, such as 614 (HWB) In the bulb there is a flower, 156 (HWB) All things bright and beautiful. Songs could also be about the working of the Holy Spirit, such as 356 (HWB) Breathe on me breath of God. If the children have done the baking exercise above, the sweets could be shared during the service, along with the recounting of memories evoked by smells. A meditation could pick up the theme of aroma therapy, how the power of smell can lead us to relaxation, invigoration, safe places, & distant memories - a safety similar to that provided by a community of faith.



# 27. The Church: Light

Matthew 5:14

*This study was prepared by  
Trinity Mennonite Church  
Calgary, Alberta*

## A. Biblical Study *Primary Biblical texts*

- Matthew 5:14-16
- Luke 8:16
- Luke 11:33-36
- Luke 16:8
- John 12:36
- Acts 13:47
- Romans 2:19
- Romans 13:12
- 2 Corinthians 4:6
- Ephesians 5:8
- 1 Thessalonians 5:5

### *Other texts*

- John 1:4-9, Christ's light becomes our light; we witness through him
- John 3:19-21, Through God's truth, we come to the light
- John 8:12, All those who follow him will never walk in darkness
- 2 Peter 1:19, Reflecting God's light

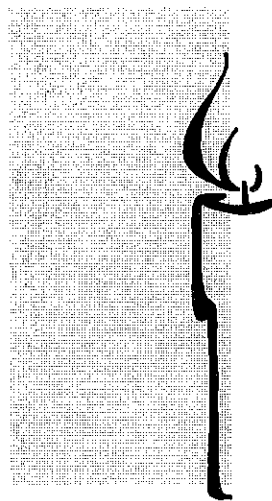
### *What this image means*

In certain cities where there is no electricity, a light really makes a difference because you notice the darkness. When you walk in darkness, you are drawn to the light. We fear blindness at night: dark and danger are closely associated. Light, therefore, is a powerful image, something the early Christians could understand.

The words in Matthew 5: 14-16 were spoken by Jesus to Jewish people, who were very familiar with Old Testament prophecies about a "great light" (e.g. Isaiah 9: 2). Jesus suggests that his followers are to reflect that light, not only to brighten their own path, but also to light the way for others ("the whole world". GND) to understand and glorify God.

### *Why this image was used*

Provides a good contrast—darkness and light. How the church and Jesus' influence is a great contrast to people without the church/Christ. Because sin is darkness, it is like being in the dark. A strong image is light shining through the darkness, being enlightened, seeing the truth or the way. Darkness is the natural or status quo and Light is the unnatural or something (Christ) added. Sight is one of the most appreciated of the five senses. Just as light illuminates the way for others, so the church has responsibility beyond itself.



## B. Communicating in the congregation *What our churches can learn*

Our role is a very significant one. We don't take it seriously enough. As the reflection of Christ in the world—we need to let others see Christ through us. Light is a powerful thing: we shine whether we choose to or not, reflecting darkness or light. We need to be more like a lighthouse, to steer ships away from doom. Ships are governments, peoples, etc.

### *Use in a worship service*

Advent/Christmas: reminds us of early morning, first light, new day. HOPE, candles at Advent.

Easter Sunday: in contrast to the darkness of Good Friday, the death of Christ.

Baptismal Services: Paul was struck blind, but saw the light after his conversion.

### *A modern symbol*

Can't improve on light. Candles continue to be a good representation of the Christian's light, but the use of a more powerful lamp or floodlight could demonstrate the Light of Christ. TV/Media as opposed to none-TV informs, as opposed to lacking knowledge—uses light rays.

While we felt that there is still no better analogy of the Church than "light", we did find one similar modern-day analogy. The current times are often referred to as the "Information Age".

While it may be argued that we are often subjected to too much information, many people agree that it would be difficult to cope in Western society without any knowledge of the current events happening around us. With today's satellite communications technology, we can visually witness war happening in real-time, half way around the world. We can see hurricanes developing and forecast quite accurately where they will strike.

We can receive telephone calls and e-mails from our missionaries in what used to be called "darkest Africa",



giving us up to the minute information about how God is working with the people there. Have you ever been on a two-week vacation in which you didn't turn on the TV or radio, or read a newspaper? Do you recall what it felt like to return to society to hear people talking about the plane crash that took 200 lives, or the tornado that destroyed three towns?

This sense of ignorance is our current day analogy of "darkness", while the information blitz is our current day analogy of light. We recognize the inadequacy of using the information blitz as an analogy of the church in a dark or ignorant world, and certainly still prefer the "light/dark" analogy, but were the Bible written today, this modern technology may strike a chord with many people in our society. Certainly the "light" imagery implies information-sharing about God's love and salvation through Christ, as well as living lives consistent with Christ's teachings.

### ***In the congregations***

#### **Worship**

- A candle used all year round every Sunday
- All the lights are out in the Sanctuary—the lights come on very slowly, then sing:
- This Little Light of Mine (by the children or children's choir.)
- Sit around the church or only in the choir loft at the front of the church
- Shine Jesus Shine
- Christian, Let your Burning Light, #402 (WB)
- Will you let me be your Servant, #307 verse 3
- Sunrise Service

### **Sunday School**

- Easy to darken your rooms
- Hide one loonie in furnace room; each child with a candle tries to find it. Whoever finds the loonie, gets to keep it.
- Sit in darkness for 2 minutes. Then find your way to the door. Add a light of some sort if needed.

### **Mission education**

Remember darkest Africa. National Geographic shows pictures of the world with the greatest density of light/fires burning etc. Sermon given using the same amount of light as that country is accustomed to. The side room is dark and the sanctuary is well lit. Light other candles. Bring them in the light. Our children didn't know what a missionary is? How does the Light of the Gospel illuminate a "dark continent"?

### **Service Outline**

#### **Possible Service Projects**

- Firewood as a fundraising project
- Salvation Army seen as a symbol of light
- Mustard Seed for homeless
- Ten Thousand Villages: Honduras packages in the congregation—send candles for them to light as a symbol of bringing Christ in their homes to light.
- Program—Use some of the "worship" ideas above, using candles, songs, etc.
- use Psalm 27: 1, 3 4 as Call to Worship
- Scripture: Isaiah 60: 1-3, John 1: 1-5, Matthew 5: 14-16
- Message could be entitled: "Journeying Through Darkness Toward Light", or "Let your Light Shine".



## 28. The Church: The last Adam

I Corinthians 15:21-23; 45-50

*This study was prepared by  
Glenlea Mennonite Church  
Glenlea, Manitoba.*

### A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical texts

I Corinthians 15:21-23

We saw the *last Adam* as an image of Christ rather than as an image of the church. However, the theme does have possibilities, as the church is called to reflect the image of the *last Adam*, Christ.

#### Other texts

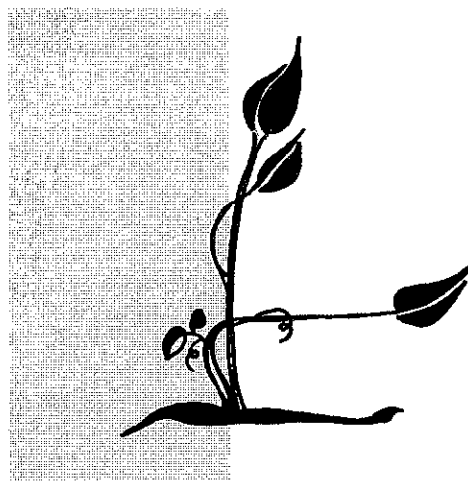
- I Corinthians 15:45-50 Paul states that as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Paul argues in favour of the resurrection by saying that as humans have earthly bodies via the first Adam, so they shall have spiritual bodies via the last Adam, namely Christ. While the first Adam was a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
- Romans 5:12; 18-19 Adam's trespasses brought condemnation on all humanity while Christ's obedient act of righteousness offered life and righteousness to many.
- Ephesians 2:14-16 By going to the cross, Christ opened the way for reconciliation between two hostile groups, Jews and gentiles, creating "in himself one new man out of the two."

#### What this image means

- According to the Interpreters Dictionary, rabbinical literature suggests a glorified Adam before the Fall and magnifies the effect of the Fall and of sin on the human race. In the OT the word Adam appears over 500 times with the meaning "man". This indicates the intention of the Biblical writers to portray the universal history of humankind. The term last Adam, one who is even greater than the first, who offers now hope to all people, attracts attention and should strike a sympathetic chord among Jewish listeners open to the gospel.
- The term last Adam is used in I Cor. 15 to argue for the resurrection and a resurrected body. The Sadducees denied any life after death. Little hope is held out for life after death, but it is definitely to be found. Many Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but not in a resurrection of the body.
- For the Corinthian church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, the term last Adam (associated with a resurrection body as displayed by Christ and the concept of a life-giving spirit) would have been quite a revolutionary concept for it offered new hope and new life to all.

#### Why this image was used

It was a widely held belief that the fate of humankind was



that of the first Adam, namely the way of sin and death. It was of utmost importance to present the alternative. What better way to do it than with the image of another Adam, the last Adam, for whom sin and death was not the final word. It is because of the last Adam that forgiveness of sin and eternal life are the new reality.

### B. Communicating in the congregation What our churches can learn

We had difficulty seeing the last Adam as an image of the church. However, the suggested text given was Ephesians 2:14-16 which speaks of *one new man* having been created out of the two groups, Jews and Gentiles. If the last Adam image is considered to be the same as the new man image, which is the united body of believers, the church, then there is a good deal to be learned from this image.

This image of the new man, the church, in whom Jews and Gentiles, all races, backgrounds and economic strata can come together, opens up exciting possibilities. The last Adam, new man image, raises themes such as forgiveness, reconciliation, peace and unity. The last Adam as a life-giving spirit suggests new life and resurrection.

#### Use in a worship service

This image could be particularly relevant for Peace Sunday, Easter Sunday, or as a Lenten theme.

#### A modern symbol

a) In the Japanese culture, flower arranging has great significance in a home. Arrangements are designed to traditionally include three lines—one vertical (symbolizing heaven), one horizontal (symbolizing the earth), and the third running upward at a 45 degree angle (between the vertical and the horizontal). Could the horizontal line be used as a symbol for the first Adam and the vertical line as a symbol for the last Adam? This idea in the form of a flower arrangement might be one way to present the image. b) This image could also be visualized as a road or time line moving from the first Adam filled with sin, strife and disunity, to the last Adam filled with forgiveness, peace and unity. Where are we in terms of our individual and corporate spirituality? c) The cross is also symbolic of the image of the last Adam with the horizontal cross piece showing the first Adam and the vertical piece representing the last Adam.



## 29. The Church: The tree of life

Revelation 22:1-5

*This study was prepared by  
Osler Mennonite Church  
Osler, Saskatchewan.*

This is the image of the tree (or trees) of life growing on both sides of the river of life which flows out from the throne of God. The tree(s) produce 12 kinds of fruit and it's leaves are used for the healing of the nations.

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary Biblical texts*

Revelation 22:1-5, 19; Genesis 2:8-11, 15 (especially vs. 9)  
Ezekiel 47:7-12; Revelation 2:7; Revelation 22:19

#### *Other texts*

Psalms 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Proverbs 3:18; John 15

#### *What this image means*

It is likely that the first readers of the Revelation to John were Christians facing persecution because of their faith in Christ. This image of a future time of growth and healing would have been a sign of hope for Christians in a time of persecution. "The 'tree of life'" conjures up images of olive trees which were, and still are, common in the Mediterranean world. The reference to the leaves being used "for the healing of the nations" (22: 2) reminds us of the practice of anointing for healing using olive oil. The leaves of the tree of life are used for the healing of people and nations. Those familiar with the Jewish scriptures, would also remember the "tree of life" in Genesis 2: 8-15. These readers would note how the tree of life appears as a symbol of paradise. The tree of life frames all of history between these images of paradise; Eden at the beginning of time and this vision of paradise still to come.

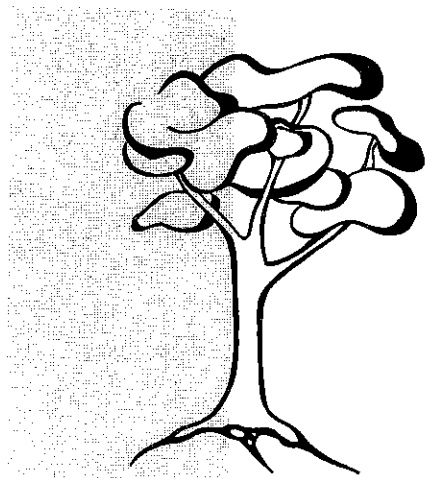
#### *Why this image was used*

This is a hopeful image and suggests that there is a future time when the church will flourish as it grows beside the river of life. The scene in Rev. 22 encourages Christians to stay close to the source of their life, the river coming from God, so they can bear fruit and be a healing agent for the nations. The image reinforces the importance of our eschatological hope that history is moving towards a future paradise where God is sovereign. We, the church, will receive an opportunity to experience the tree of life (Genesis 2: 9) in the paradise to come. Paradise will be a time and place where humanity will enjoy the tree of life which we have not tasted since being expelled from the Garden of Eden.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

We learn that everything we need for growth is available



to us in God's spirit—the river of life. Thus, the church flourishes only when it remains close to God's spirit. If we, the church, do not get our strength from the river, from God, then we dry up like trees which have no water. The church can be an agent of healing. The work of healing, peacemaking, conflict resolution and prayer are as integral to the church as the medicinal leaves are to the tree of life. The fact that there are twelve different kinds of fruit suggests that we cannot expect all people of the church to have the same talents and gifts. This reminds us that the church has many different parts (1 Corinthians 12) and many different fruit (Galatians 5: 22).

- **Healing service:** The tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, is a mandate for the church to take seriously its purpose of bringing healing to our world.
- **Missions emphasis:** We are called to use our leaves for "the healing of the nations".
- **Baptism:** We are baptized in water, like the river of the water of life, and we are to remain close to that river, the spirit of God.
- **Funerals:** This is an image of believers living productive lives in the paradise to come. It speaks of our hope for a new life.

#### *A modern symbol*

A string of electric Christmas lights could be a modern equivalent. If a string of Christmas lights is to provide enough light, then it needs to be plugged in! Similarly the tree(s) of life need to be close to the river of God.

#### **Worship**

Related songs in Hymnal: A Worship Book

#509 The tree of life; #373 Thou true vine (healing service)  
#372 O healing river (healing service); #610 On Jordan's stormy banks; #606 Oh, have you not heard (focus on "beautiful stream")

- Responsive reading of Revelation 22: 1-5, #861
- Make a banner, picture or mural of the tree of life as described in Revelation 22. sub-title could be "For the healing of the nations".
- Use this banner as a pictorial directory of our congregations. Place pictures of your "church family" (individuals and families) as the leaves at the end of branches. (or pictorial mission directory)



## 30. The Church: Disciples

Matthew 28:19; Acts 6:1

*This study was prepared by  
Avon Mennonite Church  
Stratford, Ontario*

### A. Biblical Study

#### Primary Biblical texts

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Acts 6:1
- Matthew 21:6

#### Other texts

Texts that give accounts of Jesus' call to become followers and the costs and challenges of discipleship: are relevant: Matthew: 4:18-22; 8:18-22; 9:9; 9:35-38; 10:1-42; 12:46-50; 16:24-28.

#### What this image means

From The New Bible Dictionary: "A disciple (from Latin *discipulus*, 'pupil, learner', corresponding to Gk. *mathetes*, from *manthano*, 'to learn') is basically the pupil of a teacher. The Hebrew term is a familiar figure as the pupil of a rabbi. In the Greek world philosophers were surrounded by their pupils. Since pupils often adopted the distinctive teachings of their masters, the word came to signify the adherent of a particular outlook in religion or philosophy. NT references to the disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18). Jews considered themselves as ultimately disciples of Moses (John 9:18), followers of John the Baptist were known as his disciples (John 9:28). Although Jesus was not an officially recognized teacher, he was popularly known as a teacher or rabbi (Mark 9:5), and his associates were known as disciples. Readiness to put the claims of Jesus first, whatever the cost, was demanded. This attitude went well beyond the normal pupil-teacher relationship and gave the word 'disciple' a new sense."

#### Why this image was used

This is one of the most basic terms for the church - the simple call of Jesus to follow in his steps. This term does not appear outside the Gospels and book of Acts.

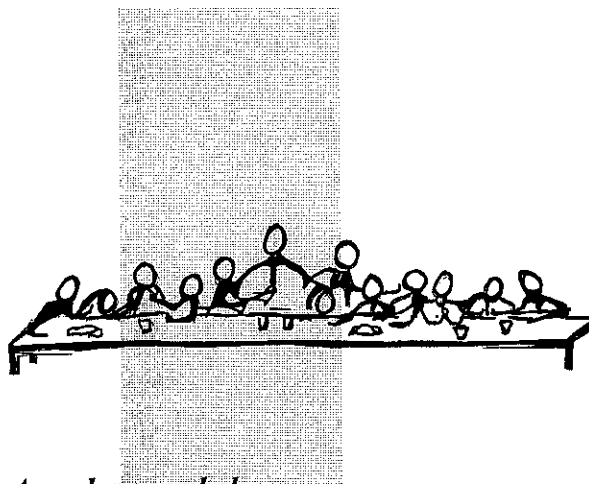
### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### What our churches can learn

While discipleship has been in many ways central in Anabaptist theology, the radical edge to it had become quite blunted. Contemporary "disciples" are too often "couch potato" in nature. A fresh call to put into practice the teachings of Jesus will challenge and disturb us.

#### Use in a worship service

Appropriate especially at the opening of a new calendar or program year, or during the period following Easter (times when people may be more open to new beginnings).



#### A modern symbol

There can be a parallel to the "I want to be like Mike!" concept (emulating superstar basketball player Michael Jordan): more than good intentions, requiring discipline, effort and costly commitment.

#### In the congregations

##### Worship

Sermon series (Sermon on the Mount; Confession of Faith articles); check hymnal indexes regarding discipleship; children's stories using WWJD (what could Jesus do?) principles; contemporize gospel "call" passages; invite commitment; spread out the occasions for baptism/membership commitments; include testimonies.

##### Sunday School

Follow-the-leader activities; study the words of Jesus; study Philip Yancey's *The Jesus I Never Knew*; focus on application; make opportunities for commitment; provide places for people to be supported in their discipleship (small groups, prayer).

##### Mission education

Bring in speakers who practice radical discipleship (e.g. Christian Peacemaker Team members); identify the part of the "all nations" that the congregation is focussing on; place a sign over the door that says: Disciples Entrance.

#### Service Outline

(Discipleship - include the truth that discipleship is a response to God; not a way of qualifying ourselves in God's sight)

Opening: Psalm 96, *Worship the Lord in the beauty, Come and sing praises*, Psalm 29, *O Worship the King*, silent confession, *Lamb of God, There is a Redeemer, We are marching in the light of God*

Offering/Offertory (*Our Best*)

Scripture: from John with song responses - portions of John 9, *Open our eyes*; portions of John 6, *Step by Step*; portions of John 14 & 15, *Faithful Men (Come and join the reapers)*. from Mark 3: 13-16

Children's Time: "WWJD" - What would Jesus do?

Message: "Becoming disciples" - as a response to what Jesus has done for us

Response: *Lord, you have come to the lakeshore*  
Sharing, Prayer, Closing & Sending #767 (HWB)



# 31. The Church: Road

Acts 9:2

*This study was prepared by  
Bergthal Mennonite Church  
Didsbury, Alberta*

## A. Biblical Study Primary Biblical texts

Acts 9:2, Church distinctly Holy Way

### Other texts

- Hebrews 1:1, 2, The Son as the head of new way and ways.
- John 14:6, I am the way, spoken by Jesus.
- Acts 9:2, 19:23, The Church as the Way.
- Acts 9:22:14; 22, ...for Felix, accurate knowledge of the Way, called the sect.
- Hebrews 10:19-20, Enter Sanctuary by new, living way.
- Hebrews 3:10, Not known my ways.
- Hebrews 9:8, Way into Sanctuary not yet opened (symbolic).
- 1 Corinthians 4:17, (Note Paul as carrier of Church) my ways in Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 12:13, Show you a more excellent way.
- Matthew 7:13,14, Compare the easy way and the hard way.
- Matthew 3:3, Prepare the way of the Lord.
- James 5:20, (comparison) other—"way of error".

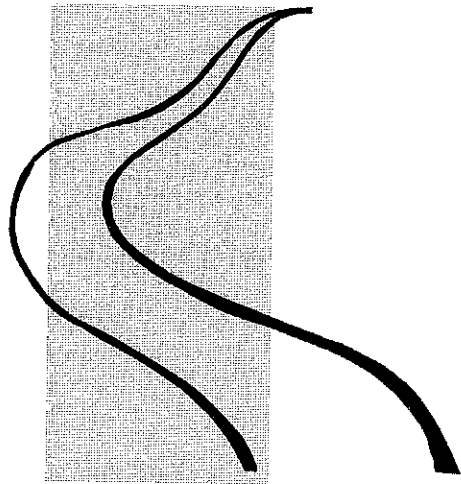
### What this image means

**Jewish people:** Israel was located on the main trade route of the Ancient world and the increase and variety of goods on it was known to the Jews. Using the image of *Road* could have a much greater meaning and significance than a footpath for folk and sheep—it included the ever-changing world of thought and economics. Jesus saying, "Here is a new way of access to God," would be significant like the highway running through Israel. Yet the concept was a mystery to many Jews who did not recognize Jesus as Messiah nor wished to follow his Way. They were comfortable in their traditions and in their assumed position of privilege. They understood themselves as having exclusive entry rights, through the Levite priests, to the Holy of Holies of God. Jesus point blanc introduces a new thought and reality coming to pass—that all persons of every nation can and shall have direct access to God through Jesus. This is the New Way.

**Gentiles:** They had been far off from the promises of God, but the new Way gave them equal access with the Jews. The Corinthian Church: Paul showed the church that was divided over the use of Gifts, the new more excellent Way—the Way of love.

To the searching: The new way gave hope and a secure guide to life.

For the believer: The Way gave security of Salvation.



### Why this image was used

- a) That a road is a reality and that it's purpose is to allow traffic from one point to another. A familiar concept.
- b) The use of the various concepts of this word allowed for understanding good and evil.
- c) Offer of a more excellent way.
- d) It targeted the conscience – "Make a decision".
- e) The new Way—connected to thoughts of being near God as Bridge of Christ, and bringing in a new unity of believers with Christ.
- f) "New Kingdom" concept required explanation.

## B. Communicating in the congregation What our churches can learn

Luke 1:79, The Church can guide and explain the way of peace.

Matthew 3:3, Like John the Baptist, the Church introduces Christ. It is a repeat of the Old Testament scripture: Isaiah 40:3 and 57:14 which calls to prepare the way for the Lord.

Mark 12:14, Like Christ, to teach honestly the way of God.

Luke 1:76, Grace and Hope in this Way for all.

Acts 16:17, Public abuse, ridicule for travellers.

Romans 11:33, The Way is totally encompassed with Goodness.

1 Corinthians 10:13, God offers a way out of temptation and testing.

Hebrews 10:20, New Way allows believers to be in the loving presence of God. Church extends welcome to enter upon this way, but also admonishes about dangers of withdrawing from the fellowship.

### Use in a worship service

**Graduation:** setting goals along this way.

**Camping:** following right paths (ways), and dangers of getting lost when straying off the path, the way.

**Choices:** travel on roads to good places vs. travel toward evil.

**Evangelical meetings:** Call to enter a new Way.

Also a call to change one's ways. Would be a suitable message for post-Easter time.

Way as verb can be used at many occasions in the year: the way of praying, of giving thanks, of worshipping.

- Continued page 54



The way to fullness of life.

The Message is carried by a messenger along the way.

### ***A modern symbol***

- For youth: the “cool” way.
- Bridge over mountain gorge.
- Hiking trails to the heights—narrow and steep, but the view is gorgeous from the top (concept borrowed from Margaret Jenzen’s book, *The view from the top.*)
- Contrast: Freeway, the broad high speed way to sin and destruction.
- Road: with road maps, detours, signs: Construction, Danger, Point of Interest.
- Space travel.

### ***In the congregations***

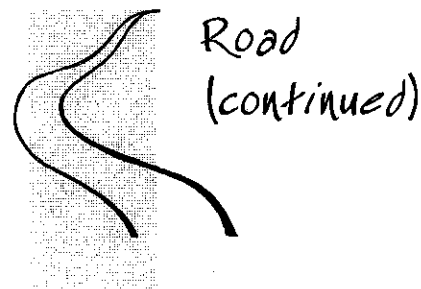
#### **Worship**

- Songs such as Mennonite Hymnal #528, 577, 250
- Reading of Psalm 23
- Messages on Matthew 7: 13, 14—Two Ways: lost/lost; empty/full; death/life; time/eternity. Paul’s journey to Damascus, experiencing Jesus on the way.
- DVBS: program and artwork

#### **Sunday School**

- All manner of cutouts, tackon characterizing the Way of God, e.g. Footprints on pathway, art or cutout or drawn in chalk on the floor, to illustrate following Jesus step by step along the way. Take a trip with the kids in the bush—get lost off track.
- Slides and pictures of Way and Wilderness.
- Youth: an example was Canada’s Great “Trek” that gathered youth along the way.
- Reader’s Theatre: Cotton Patch Gospel—Pilgrim’s Progress retold in a modern setting.
- Use the earlier *Way Bible* with the road picture on the back and Way on the front.

Other: Deeper Life and Evangelistic services could use decore, banner, song and “Road” dramatization.



Children’s Story Time: dramatize on “on Damascus Road”; “Disciples on the Road to Emmaus.”

- Camping: blindfold Grandpa and have children (representing Way or Church of God) lead him around, interpreting what they see; what an adventure!
- Liturgical dance to interpret Psalm 23.

#### **Mission education**

Women in Mission: The drama on Synerge, the Cup of Cold Water that each participant was to share along the way.

#### **Service Outline**

Opening: sing-along, using some of songs such as Mennonite Hymnal #528,

“Come we that love the Lord”; #577 “When we walk with the Lord”; #250 “We walk by faith”.

Prayer.

Scripture: Psalm 23 and liturgical dance.

Drama or Reader’s Theatre, Pilgrim’s Progress in modern setting.

Message: John 14:6: I am the Way.

Could include a) the challenge of choice: Matthew 7: 13, 14; b) the challenge of the narrow Way; c) invitation: to come to Jesus, the Way, to walk the Jesus Way to Glory.

Prayer.

Closing Hymn: Mennonite Hymnal #543, He leadeth me.



# 32. The Church: Coming and Going

John 14:4-6

*This study was prepared by  
Emmanuel Mennonite Church  
Abbotsford, British Columbia*

## A. Biblical Study

### Primary Biblical texts

- John 14:4-6 in the larger context of John 14:1-6
- Related texts in this gospel:
- John 12:12-15; 13; 1ff
- Psalm 149

### Other texts

The church coming and going on the way:

- Psalm 77:13
- Jeremiah 32:39
- Isaiah 30:21, 40:3 (cf. Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23)
- Acts 9:2; 16:17, 24:14
- Hebrews 10:20
- Coming to Jesus:
- Matthew 11:28-30
- Mark 10:13-16
- Going in service:
- Matthew 28:19-20
- Luke 10:30-37

### What this image means

John 14:1-6 offers a pilgrimage image of the church. In these few verses, the word "go" appears four times, and the word "way" three times. This is the church on the move, on the way. The life of faith as a journey goes back to the Old Testament—to Abraham, to Moses and the Hebrew people, to the prophets and psalmists who wrote about the way of the Lord (see #2 above). This way is the way of faith (trusting in God through faith in Jesus, v. 1), the way of hope (there is a future, v. 3), the way of Jesus (to be on the way means to be like Jesus—Matthew 16:24).

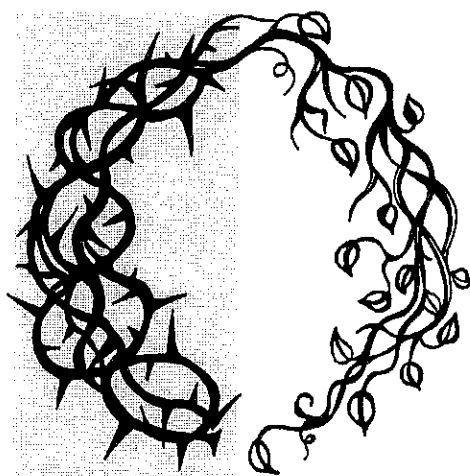
### Why this image was used

This image is dynamic—includes change, growth, life as a journey, which is something everyone can relate to in ancient times and also today.

## B. Communicating in the congregation

### What our churches can learn

Sometimes the church is like Thomas—unsure of where we are going—but we can take comfort in this image of the church, which is dynamic, not static; full of hope for the present and future.



### Use in a worship service

Any time when we reflect on our direction, e.g. funerals, Missions Sunday, congregational meetings, Lent, New Year's, Christmas (because many people are travelling—coming and going—at that time), Easter (resurrection), September (a new stage of our journey each year).

### A modern symbol

A passport; a train—the tracks go in a certain direction and if we want to go there too, follow the tracks already laid out; a TCP/IP packet transmitted through the Internet—many bits of information banded together on a journey; a big cruise ship—the "Love Boat" on its way to heaven.

### In the congregations

#### Worship

HWB #14, #226, #307, #355, #427, #439, #599

Tell contemporary/historical stories of Christian pilgrims.

#### Sunday School

Play follow the leader with the children

Study church history: what is relevant for our church today.

#### Mission education

a) Ask God to show us how to relate this message to other religions; b) Twin with a church in the 2/3's world; 3) Share stories from other cultures, other parts of the world.

### Service Outline

To explore coming together

- Welcome and Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Congregational gathering songs, including HWB #226
- The Church on the Way
- Testimonies/Sharing Faith Stories
- Pastoral Prayer & Offering
- Congregational Singing—HWB #307
- Children's Feature
- Scripture Reading: John 14:1-16
- Message: A Pilgrim People
- Time for Reflection and Response
- The Church going to serve
- Closing Song: HWB #355
- Benediction



# 33. The Church: Friends

John 15:15

*This study was prepared by  
Langley Mennonite Fellowship  
Langley, British Columbia*

## A. Biblical Study

### *Primary Biblical texts*

- James 2:23, Abraham, a friend of God
- Exodus 33:11, Moses spoke to God face to face, as a friend

### *Other texts*

- Proverbs 3:32, sharing the confidence of God
- Psalms 25:14
- Proverbs 18:24, there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother
- Matthew 11:16-19, a friend of sinners

### *What this image means*

- Salutation (non-threatening, non-hierarchical salutation, "Comrade")
- Matthew 20:13, 22:12, 26:50
- Friendship is a choice, family is a given
- Proverbs 17:17
- Faith not mysterious but open to all

### *Why this image was used*

- non threatening
- equality with Jesus
- different from existing religions, members are not born into the church but are there by choice.

## B. Communicating in the congregation

### *What our churches can learn*

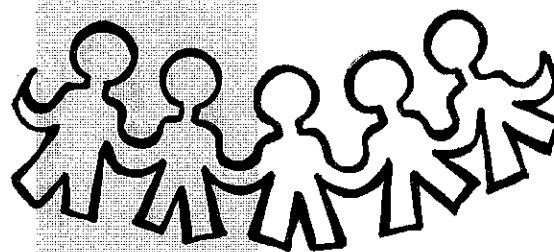
- intimacy
- confession/correcting/rebuking/comfort
- assuming goodwill
- finding good in everyone
- having fun together

### *Use in a worship service*

- Lent
- Advent
- Mission Sunday
- Baptism or New Membership Sunday
- Commissioning Sunday School Teachers

### *A modern symbol*

- the LMF puzzle (large wooden puzzle of the MCC symbol)
- passing the handshake of peace in a service
- footwashing or a modern day equivalent (shoulder massage – in a line or circle)
- paper doll chain
- a circle of friends ceramic figures
- Quakers: a society of friends



### *In the congregations*

#### Worship

#### Song Ideas

- #421 Blest Be the Tie That Binds
- #420 Heart With Loving Heart United
- #573 What a Friend We Have in Jesus
- #362 Help Us to Help Each Other
- #450 Here in Our Upper Room
- #89 For the Beauty of the Earth
- #310 How Good a Thing it is
- #595 Jesus, Priceless Treasure
- #452 Ubi Caritas et amor
- #307 Servant Song

#### Drama Ideas

- Good Samaritan Story retold in different era's
- Jonathan and David
- Zaccheus
- Lazarus
- Paul and Onesimus
- Readers Theatre
- Scriptures read from different parts of the church, enfolding the fellowship in the reading.
- A reading put together by a Sunday School class: A true friend... loves you when you are not lovable, loves you when you are sad, etc.
- Stories, which could be read aloud, from other sources.
- Slides of people being friendly
- handshaking
- hugging
- high 5's, etc.
- Prayers (in Hymnal)
- #726, #774, #777, #800, reworded to be more inclusive, #681, Apostles creed and Schleithem creed which define the faith that binds us together.
- Banner ideas
- old person's hand with a young person's hand in it
- paper doll chain
- Discussion subjects
- friendship toward: immigrants, separated couples, mentally handicapped, children, shy people, mentoring between youth & adults/families/adopting grandparents.



## 34. The Church:

# Household of God

1 Peter 4:17

*This study was prepared by  
Peace Mennonite Church  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

### A. Biblical Study

#### *Primary Biblical texts*

- Galatians 6:10
- Ephesians 2:19
- 1 Timothy 3:15
- 1 Peter 4:17

#### *Other texts*

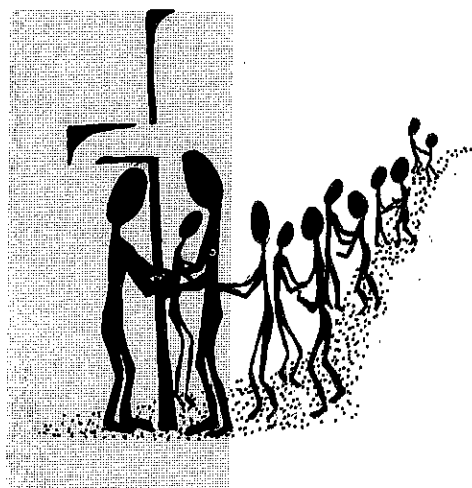
- 1 Corinthians 8:11, we are concerned for our weaker sibling and we bear a personal commitment to them
- Colossians 4:7, Ephesians 6:21, co-workers in the church are "our sisters and brothers"
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14, doing "merciful actions" is one of the gifts within the community
- 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; II Corinthians 8:4, 9:1, 12; Romans 15:25-26, all members share in the same "holiness" – no one person or group of members possess a particular "holiness" denied the others.

#### *What this image means*

The household of God is made up of Jews and Gentiles. It will not be necessary for Gentiles to become Jews (i.e. undergo circumcision) in order for them to be Christian and be part of the church.

Christians are to see themselves as members of the divine family. Jesus Christ in a unique sense is God's Son who identified with humans. His actions on behalf of all people made it possible for all to "receive adoption as children." It thus is appropriate to call God "Abba" and to share in the intimacy of relationship which this term invites.

In the New Testament, *oikia* is the ordinary word for family. Disobedience to parents is a sin, and caring for one's family is strongly ingrained. According to Jesus, the true family is made up of those who do Jesus' father's will. As such the relationships in the household were not that of a master surrounded by slaves, but rather the encounter between adult children and their father. These relationships grew ever more intimate and mature (Galatians 4ff, Ephesians 4:13 ff). The solidarity of the family is the building block of the spiritual family of God



is evident in "household" conversions and baptisms (John 4:53).

The early Christians congregations were family or house churches, meeting in domestic buildings and led by the householders, including women as husband-and-wife joint leaders (Acts 2:46). Just as Jesus became human and served humanity, Christians are to be servants to each other regardless of church job or title. Christians walk together. They do not lord it over the other, neither inside the community nor outside of it (Galatians 6:10).

The household of God was both a local and a heavenly "assembly." They are God's Family (Ephesians 2:19). They are a spiritual family which involved sharing and caring for each other. And this also means that there will come a time when they will undergo persecution just as the eldest brother, Jesus, suffered (1 Peter 4:17).

#### *Why this image was used*

We all live in family units, therefore we can relate to it. As families with a strong patriarchal centre, this reinterpretation places the power in Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, with all people as equal siblings in the household.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### *What our churches can learn*

Christ is the one who unites us as people from Hague and from Liberia. As part of the household of faith we are called to care for each other just as we care for our own families of origin.

#### *Use in a worship service*

At Peace Mennonite Church we celebrate a Covenanting Service once a year near the anniversary of its beginning. This is a Sunday in which we renew our commitment to God and each other. It resembles a marriage or baptismal service.

#### *A modern symbol*

The symbol is that of a bicycle wheel with spokes running from the rim into the centre hub. God in Jesus Christ is the hub of the wheel. The spokes, all with equal range of motion, are the members. The rim is the world, where the

- Continued page 58



“rubber hits the road.” The closer we as individuals get to the centre which is God, the closer we come to each other. Each spoke is expected to bear the same weight as the other, regardless of how it got there (during the manufacturing process or a repair job later on).

Each member of the church is expected to use their gifts for the strength of the church, and each person is given equal opportunity to voice their opinion during decision making (consensus decision making).

## In the congregations

### Worship

- banner: with various family groupings represented (older couples, single mother with child(ren), two parents with two children and a dog, a single person...)
- game: for intergenerational worship – place a large wheel formation on the floor. Goal is to move the whole group into the centre with Jesus. Players draw cards and depending on the attitudes or actions described on the cards, the players move closer or farther away from the centre. This is a graphic way to demonstrate that which pulls us away from God and community, and that which draws us closer.
- songs: (HWB) #307, #492, #362, #6, #311, #363
- worship centre: photos of each family grouping in the local church centered around the Bible.

## Service Outline

### Covenanting Service

#### We Gather

#### Call to Worship

*L: Come, people of God, and worship the Christ.*

*Once we were separated from him, aliens and strangers who did not belong,*

*without hope and without God in the world. Once we loved darkness rather than light. Once we could not sing the Lord's song.*

*P: But now we are joined with Christ, brought near through his blood, for he is our peace. Now we who lived in darkness have come into the light.*

*Now we who could not sing have been given a new song.*

*All: Let us give thanks to God! Let us worship God!*

(Marlene Kropf in Words for Worship, #95)

#### Opening Prayer

*Sovereign God, we confess that you are Creator of the world; we confess that Jesus Christ is our only hope in life and death; we confess that your Spirit bears witness with ours that we are your children. We gather to thank you for the tasks we have to do and the resources we give one another. Draw us together. Give us grace to speak the truth freely with each other, open our lips so our mouths might show forth your praise. In Jesus name, AMEN.*

(John D. Rempel in Words for Worship, #122)

Opening Hymn: #37 (HWB) Praise to the Lord

Time with the church community: Sharing, Announcements, Congregational prayer

#### Listening for the voice of God



Skit: It isn't easy being alone (Dean Nadasdy in Cross Views, Story dramas that teach the faith, pgs. 5-7)

Hymn: #306 (HWB) In Christ there is no east or west

Story: “It isn't easy being green” (if this story hasn't been written, then someone will write it)

Hymn: #332 (HWB) Blessed assurance

Scripture: Galatians 6:7-10; Ephesians 2:11-22

Message: The Church as the Household of God (this would be a good time to use the wheel to talk about the church. Included would also be a review of covenant – what God has covenanted with us, and what new are now invited to do with each other and with God.)

#### We Respond

Hymn: #420 (HWB) Heart with loving heart united

#### Covenanting service

Read over the covenant form

Persons wishing to covenant with Peace Mennonite Church for the next year are invited to come forward and sign the covenant form

Recommitment Covenant prayer

*We commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ, through whom God has reconciled the world, and in whom we continue the work of reconciliation.*

*We commit ourselves to each other and this congregation,*

*promising to love our brothers and sisters in God's family.*

*We will share our time, our decisions, our love,*

*our talents and possessions for everyone's good.*

*We commit ourselves to care for the world*

*To bring good news to the poor, to set free the oppressed, and to proclaiming Jesus as liberator and Lord.*

*We commit ourselves to the way of the cross, to a life of simplicity and prayer.*

*In this we will find our joy, our peace and our life*

(Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, ON in Words for Worship #283)

Closing Hymn: #421 (HWB) Blessed be the tie that binds

Blessing: Peace to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 6:23-24)



## ***Peace Mennonite Church Covenant 1998***

- Gen. 9:8-17; God made a covenant with Noah for all time.
- Deut. 26:16-18; God's command to the people of God.
- Jer. 31:31-34; The promise of a new covenant.
- I Peter 3:18-22; God calls all people through Christ to live the way of the covenant.

### **Congregational Consensus**

- Faith in God, in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the Holy Spirit precedes baptism, membership and covenanting.
- The aim of covenanting is to unify and to enhance the spiritual life and Christian witness of Peace Mennonite Church.
- The act of covenanting indicates a fully informed commitment to Christ and the church.
- Non-members who feel fully committed to Christ and the church and who attend regularly are invited to covenant with members.
- The covenanting service will be held annually.

### **The Covenant**

- This covenant is a commitment to a relationship with Jesus Christ and the people of Peace Mennonite Church.
- The reality and strength of Peace Mennonite Church relies on inter-personal ministry to the emotional, financial and spiritual needs of the church community. As was the practice in the early church, we also seek to be available, liable and accountable to each other through Christ who has endowed us with gifts and abilities suitable for the common good.
- As a believer in God, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, I affirm my commitment to sister and brother believers to prayerfully contribute a portion of my time, energy, talents and financial resources; to pray for each other; to give and receive spiritual counsel and observe mutual respect with those who worship at Peace Mennonite Church and to the members of the Christian faith community.

Signature:

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## 35. The Church:

# Children of God

John 1:12

*This study was prepared by  
First Mennonite Church  
Calgary, Alberta*

### A. Biblical Study

#### Primary Biblical Texts

- John 1:12, but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God.
- Matthew 5:9, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Romans 8:15b-16, When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...
- I John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed.

#### Other Texts

- Ephesians 1:3-14, touches on several themes
- Becoming God's Children:
- John 1:12, by receiving Christ, belief
- Galatians 3:26, in Christ (i.e. by faith)
- Galatians 4:5 and Ephesians 1:5, by adoption
- Romans 8:14, 16, the role of the Spirit
- I John 5:1, by believing that Jesus is the Christ.

#### Showing the family characteristics:

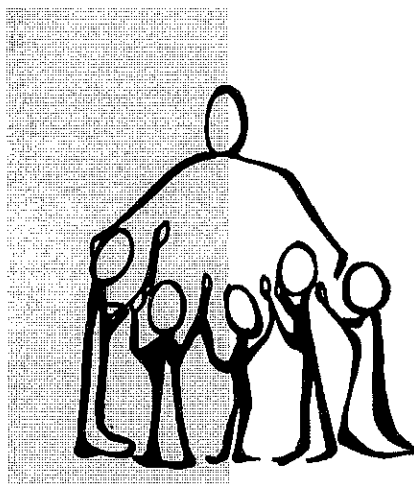
- Matthew 5:9, being peacemakers
- Matthew 5:45, loving enemies, the just and the unjust
- I John 3:1,10, doing right, showing love
- Ephesians 5:1-2, be imitators of God...live in love.
- Philippians 2:15, be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish...
- Enjoying belonging:
- Romans 8:15b-16 & Galatians 4:6-7, the Spirit helps us cry out the term of endearment, "Abba! Father!" we are no longer slaves.
- 2 Corinthians 6:18, God calls us sons and daughters

#### Future fulfillment:

- I John 3:2
- Galatians 4:7, we are heirs
- Romans 8:14-23 (especially 17, 19 & 23), all creation awaits God's next steps for us as his heirs.
- Revelation 21:7, God's reward for those who "conquer"
- Note that there are several other references to this image; those with the phrase "sons of God" or "children of God" are easy to find in any concordance.

#### What this image means

Jewish persons could think back to the rich biblical theme of Israel as God's children (Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1).



It would be more troubling for them to see gentiles being similarly addressed. Nicodemus with his pseudoscientific questions typifies those who had difficulty getting their heads around the miracle of this new relationship, whether for themselves or for gentiles.

For Gentiles, this image opened up a whole new relationship, both this God and with believers from Jewish background. In some senses, they heard in this image John's words about raising "from these stones children to Abraham." (Luke 3:8). While they had some notion that we are "God's offspring" (Acts 17:28), this image invited them to belong to God's family in a way unimaginable before Christ. Note that the epistle references (primarily to Gentiles) often draw out the implication that we love one another as fellow sons and daughters of the same God.

#### Why this image was used

The church is where we belong. God has chosen us to be children. The image, "children of God," reminds us that we don't get there by starting out perfect; we come as children, make mistakes and grow, showing more and more of the family characteristics as we mature. This image talks about how we come into God's family, the qualities we share with our Parent, the intimacy we experience with God, And our future experience as heirs whom all creation envies. A passage such as Ephesians 1:3-14 would be just one place where many of these themes are combined.

### B. Communicating in the congregation

#### What our churches can learn

This image provides a powerful picture of belonging for a world which knows far too much about alienation and feeling orphaned. This image forges language about beginnings ("born by the Spirit" and "adoption"), ethics ("perfect" imitators and "love") and closeness ("Abba!") thus helping integrate important themes we often polarize.

#### Use in a worship service

Appropriate times for these theme include Advent, Child Dedication, Mother's Day, Outreach/Mission Sundays, among others.



## ***A modern symbol***

Modern stories about orphans or street children (whether in person, MCC video or worker) can help focus the belonging motif. Visual symbol possibilities include a mother hen with chicks, a larger hand clasping a smaller hand, or gingerbread style cutout figures surrounding a cross.

### **Worship**

The four aspects of this symbol can be combined within one service, or can be the basis for four services.

- Hands – (or other visual symbols noted above) can become a unifying symbol, illustrating the bulletin cover, and worship banner, useful also for symbolic movements and actions.
- It is especially appropriate to have the children (and their artwork) in front and centre, modeled somewhat on Jesus welcoming the children.
- An adoption story (by an adopter or an adoptee) or a testimonial about a spiritual “Aha!” moment can focus the “beginning” or “closeness” motifs.
- There are several relevant songs of belonging such as “Blest be the tie that binds,” “God’s Family,” “We are one in the Spirit” and “Will the Circle be unbroken”

### **Sunday School**

If Sunday School and worship can focus around the same theme, intergenerational groups can create worship banners, tracing their own hands to form a circle.

Simple games can be created about belonging or family characteristics.

- Place shoes or jackets in the centre of the circle, identify each other’s and talk about whether these or other features make them “belong.” Adults can do simple genealogy exercise, talking together about their family characteristics.
- People can be asked to bring baby (or grandparent) pictures to use for an identification game, once again focusing on the family characteristics. These can provide the springboard for study of passages on becoming God’s children or on God’s family’s characteristics.

Sunday school subtheme: “belonging”

- action songs like “He’s got the whole world”

- game time: “Belonging” (shoes, jackets – see above)
- story time: Retell the story of Jesus and the children – Matthew 19:13-15
- option: have a grandparent (with or without children and grandchildren present) tell stories about what it means to be part of a family – both benefits and expectations
- theme verse: Matthew 5:9 – memorize for use in worship service
- craft time: create gingerbread style paper cutouts in assorted sizes and colours for use on worship display backdrop (a circle of people joining hands around a cross.)

### **Mission Education**

Focus around the Pauline passages (Galatians, Romans, Ephesians)

“Adoption” “birth by the Spirit” and “faith” allow even stones to become “children to Abraham” i.e. God’s children and chosen people (Matthew 3:9)

Visually, this may be indicated as simply as hands or gingerbread style people circling a globe.

Stories can be told from around the globe, demonstrating the cultural and visual differences as well as the shared “family characteristics” (e.g. stories about helping the handicapped or dealing with enemies).

### **Worship Service:**

*Call to worship:* gather children who place figures in circle around cross

Leader: Reads Matthew 18:3-5, then asks children “What sort of people are easily recognized as God’s children?”

Children: Matthew 5:9

*Becoming children of God:* (5 readers, popcorn style)

Nicodemus with his question: John 3:2-4

Responses: 1 John 5:1-2; John 1:12, Ephesians 1:5

Jesus: John 3:5

*Being children of God*

The rich young ruler’s question –Matthew 19:20

A panel discussion or an interviewer asking questions about the characteristics of God’s children (see references and illustrate from experience)

*What has God in store for the Children of God?* (3

readers) Peter’s question: Matthew 19:27

Further responses: Romans 8:15-17; 1 John 3:2

*Closing circle* (form circle)

Sing “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” or “In Christ there is no east or west”



## 36. The Church: *Body of Life*

Romans 5-8, (7:4)

*This study was prepared by  
Charleswood Mennonite Church  
Winnipeg, Manitoba*

### A. Biblical Study

#### **Primary Biblical texts**

Romans 5-8 uses "body" language. Paul talks about "body" in the singular in certain passages but also in the plural as a body of people to which we belong. One body is the "body of death" (7:24), or the "sinful body" (6:6). The other body, by implication is the "body of life". The two bodies are bodies of people in which we participate. If we are a part of the "body of death", or the "sinful body" we are in trouble.

Paul talks about these two bodies or two humanities in different ways. Here are some examples:

- Body of Life (term not explicitly used, but implied by "body of death") or Body of Death
- "In Christ" or "In Adam"
- In the Flesh (an orientation which disregards the Spirit of God) or In the Spirit (an orientation which lives life in connection with the Spirit of God)
- Body of Christ or body of death

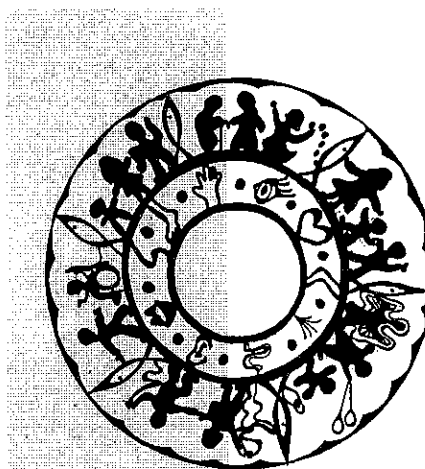
To be "in Christ" or in the "Body of Life" is to participate with others in a body of humanity who commit themselves to Christ. It is the body where "eternal life rules" (*Images of the Church from the New Testament*, Minear, p. 175.)

Paul himself speaks of his own past where "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do ... Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:19-24) The ministry of Christ is to transfer us from the "body of death" to the "body of life".

#### **Other texts**

Although the term *body of life* is not stated specifically but only implied in Romans 7:24, other passages which are parallel are those which use the term "the body of Christ" which seems to be in part a name for the church. Romans 12:5 states "we though many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another."

1 Corinthians 12:27 says "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Ephesians 4: :15-16 "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the body joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love."



#### **What this image means**

Body of Life: A body of people means that individualism is not an option. We belong to Christ and are connected to one another. A body of Life for the early Christians meant that even though being Christian was sometimes difficult, it was ultimately a path of life, wholeness and blessing as opposed to death, disintegration and curse.

#### **Why this image was used**

- To show that being Christian should be understood as the beginnings of a new humanity, made up of rich and poor, slaves and free, Jew and Gentile, male and female. Body of Life means that the church is a visible flesh and blood entity where no part is dispensable.
- To show that being Christian stands for Life in all its goodness.

### B. Communicating in the Congregation

#### **What our churches can learn**

In an age of individualism and narcissism, the term body of life teaches us that as unique individuals we are a part of a greater whole. In an age of fragmentation and disintegration, the term body of life teaches us that Christ created the church to be a place that stands for life over against death.

#### **Use in a worship service**

Body of Life could be used at Easter to mark resurrection and life imagery, at Pentecost to mark the birth of the church, or at the beginning of the year to make a fresh start.

#### **A modern symbol**

A quilt depicting vine and branches. Vine and branches are like a body where all parts are connected. A quilt where each square (member) is unique but joined together to form one quilt (body).

#### **In the congregations**

##### **Worship**

- banner- a body of Christ figure on the cross made up of many small people who are connected together- could be a line drawing.



- having people of different churches light candles and read scripture in each others churches, to show that we are linked together in one body.
- using cross-cultural church stories that stress the connectedness of the church as a wider body.

### **Sunday school**

Sunday school could make a quilt with many different unique squares depicting individuals who are joined together.

### **Mission education**

Stressing salvation from the things in our world that make for death, decay, and disintegration and salvation for the things that make for life.

<b>Life:</b>	<b>Death:</b>
respect	looking down on others
love	fear
blessing	curse
sharing	selfishness
tolerance	racism
joy	gossip, slander
peace	war
patience	impatience
kindness	unkindness
forgiveness	grudges

### ***Service Outline***

#### ***Body of Life Program***

with Churches of Differing Ethnic backgrounds.

Welcome

Body of Life scripture passage

Song

Sharing from one culture:

What does the church look like in that culture?

How does the church express itself as a body in that culture?

What life and death struggles do people of the church have in that culture?

Song

Prayer

*Potluck* - two or three cultures sharing food together as one body



# Appendix

## The Grand Design: The Church in the New Testament

*The following is an excerpt from Naming the Sheep (Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1997), a resource created for congregations in Canada to explore and discuss the meaning and practice of church membership. To order a copy of this resource, contact the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (see address on back page).*

Two stories are on my desk at the time of writing. One concerns a Mennonite congregation that, after years of conflict with a lay minister, decided to move toward reconciliation, forgiveness, and a reconsideration of its plan to withdraw the credentials of the minister. The other concerns a Presbyterian pastor who is moving toward excommunicating his entire denomination, given that he feels the church has not treated him or his family fairly during a recent crisis. It is striking that these two cases would come to my desk on the same morning. They demonstrate some common elements.

Both cases assume that being the church implies accountability. In the first case, the church holds its member, even its pastor, accountable. In the second, the church is held accountable by one of its members. Both assume that membership in the church is serious business. Both believe that due process must be followed. Both presuppose that responsibilities and rights are inter-connected. Both attempt to draw boundaries: being the church cannot mean everything to all people even though it is meant to draw all people to itself.

It is noteworthy that these two stories come out of very distinct traditions. The Anabaptists, in the sixteenth century, declared the official church of its time no longer to be the true church. The official church had lost its credibility and therefore its authority, they said. The Presbyterian (Reform) tradition, in turn, persecuted the Anabaptists for their heresies. The tables were turned: The Anabaptists, in a sense, excommunicated the official church, while the Reform tradition (Presbyterian) excommunicated its Anabaptist members. Both traditions were concerned about doctrinal orthodoxy, ethical conformity, and political correctness.

*Orthodoxy? Excommunication? Conformity? Heresy? Accountability?* These are not everyday words in our world that encourages diversity and relativizes orthodoxy. Our pluralistic world teaches us to be tolerant and inclu-

sive and to shy away from distinctives that might exclude. Our post-modern world teaches us to focus on what is local; to commit ourselves to what is relative; to enjoy what is partial. It is distrustful of 'the big picture' and suspicious of over-arching systems. It is more comfortable with 'random acts of kindness' than with systemic 'principles of mercy'; it directs our attention to the micro worlds of compassion rather than to the macro worlds of justice. It encourages us "to think locally but to act globally."

### *What does it mean to be the church in our context?*

Certainly, the church would never deny the importance of the immediate, the local, the partial, and the micro worlds in which we live. The church's ministry is defined in these terms. Yet the church cannot forget about the macro framework, 'the kingdom of God,' the historical sweep of salvation history, the universal task of ministry, and the attempt to "unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

With the Biblical testimony as its foundation, the church hopes to promote those roads that encourage life under God's rule. Yet, history, even church history, demonstrates that many roads lead to destruction and death. Careful discernment is necessary; not all 'spirits' are from God. The church finds it impossible to ignore the over-arching framework. The 'big picture', i.e., God's universal reign, defines the church and determines its direction. To proclaim that God is creator is to declare that our place under God's rule has universal implications. The church must plug into this global rule of God.

It is, therefore, important to ask again what it means to be the church, and how the church is to consider the meaning of membership. The essays in this volume demonstrate that these questions are not easy ones. The authors have grappled with various dimensions of these questions. I wish to provide a broad overview of the New Testament witness about what it means to be the church. This witness is both invigorating and sobering as we contemplate our own perspectives about the meaning of church membership.

### *Ninety-six ways to be the church*

What does it mean to be the church? Paul Minear, now retired professor from Yale University, set out to answer that question. Using the New Testament as his guide, he discovered 96 images that talk about what it means to be the church (cf. *Images of Church in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975). What a banquet of meaning! What a menu of nourishment! Minear focuses not only on the variations on this menu of metaphors but



also demonstrates how they are interconnected. It is difficult, for example, to talk about the church as *the new creation* without also talking about the church as *the new humanity*, or the *first fruits*, or the *royal priesthood*. To talk about the church as the *body* is impossible without also talking about it as the *temple*.

Imagine, 96 images to try to communicate to the reader what it means to be the church! How dry and unimaginative our efforts seem at times when compared to the creative attempts by the New Testament authors to communicate the wealth of meaning of being the church.

The church is a *boat*, a *bride*, and a *temple*. It is a *lamp*, a *chosen nation*, and a *field*. The church is an *open letter*, a *flock*, and an *aroma*. It is a *virgin* and an *ambassador*. These are only eleven of the word pictures the New Testament authors use to talk about the church.

With these pictures they attempt to communicate not only the shape of the church, but its purpose, its desire, its strategy, and its soul. The church as a *body* says one thing, the church as *salt* and *light* says something else (or does it?). The church as a *public letter* says one thing, the church as a *lamb* or as an *exile* says something else (or does it?).

It is interesting that in spite of the wealth of metaphor in the New Testament communicating the nature of the church, one looks in vain for a precise definition, an authoritative shape, one given organization or structure. This lack of precision can be disconcerting for those wishing to defend and justify one and only one notion of *church*. We note two temptations in responding to this smorgasbord of images, both readily apparent in our century.

One is the limiting response: "I'll choose one or two of the 96 and build my church on those. It's just too big and confusing to try to do it any other way." The other temptation is the relativizing response: "If the church can be defined by using 96 varied images, then there must be another 96 that are equally legitimate. I'll create my own image, and define it in the way I prefer." Whereas the first temptation leads to the fossilization of structures and understanding and a fear of learning more, the second one leads to fluidity in which there is no shape, thereby putting the church beyond critique or careful discernment.

A closer look at the 96 images of the church demonstrates that the church is meant to be neither fossil nor shapeless. The genius of the 96 images is that imagination does not contradict careful definition and discernment. Let me explain.

There is no one dominant image of the church in the New Testament. This fact serves to enhance the importance of each image. There is no unimportant image of the church in the New Testament. Although it is true that the images unveil a certain fluidity in the definition of the church, it is not true that these definitions contradict each other or move in different directions. There is fluidity as well as congruency; many images are interwoven, they build on each other; in some cases they are reciprocal.

When each image is studied separately, it is apparent that none points simply to itself. They all point beyond their own meanings to something greater. This is the nature of metaphor. Thus, each image increases the importance of the other, because it provides greater insight into that which both point to.

The images are not meant to be isolated. While each one deserves special attention, the full glory of the individual images is brought out in the synoptic, composite understanding of them all together.

The New Testament writers, without exception, understand the church to be a community of believers continually guided by the Spirit of Jesus toward greater knowledge of and commitment to the purpose of Jesus. None of the images contradicts this larger purpose. All of the images attempt to communicate this intention.

Each image ties the purpose of Jesus to the larger purpose of God's activity in human history. The word often used to identify this purposeful movement of God in history is the word 'eschatology.' Each of the images is rooted in God's history and imagines the church as an instrument to move that history forward. The church, reflecting this purpose, is thus presented as an eschatological community.

The wealth of images is not meant to water down, pluralize, or relativize the importance of the individual parts, but is designed to enhance each part. Each image and the entire system of images are designed to create greater awareness and imagination of what a people, faithful to the eternal purposes of God in history, might look like and might do.

The church is most faithful when it tries to understand and implement what each image points to. The church is least faithful when it uses the abundance of images to justify its inactivity or when it uses the multiplicity of images to pretend that it doesn't matter much what any one in particular wishes to communicate.

The system of images takes for granted that the Holy Spirit is the permanent guest of the church. It is this Spirit



of God that gifts the church for ministry, educates it for discernment, empowers it for resistance, and nourishes it for discipleship to Jesus.

The images also assume that the Holy Spirit, as a permanent guest, has access to and is welcome in all of the rooms that make up the church (the temple of God). The Spirit is welcome in our boardrooms and bedrooms; it is welcome in our bank accounts and in our recreational activities.

The church's ministry of hospitality is extended first and foremost to the Holy Spirit, opening all doors and discussions to this presence. Because of the hospitality extended to the Holy Spirit, the church feels comfortable extending the same hospitality to others seeking relationships and direction.

Perhaps we need two more reminders. First, we must remember that the New Testament use of images and metaphors to talk about the church is an inspired use of human language. Ultimately we are trying to understand the mystery of God creatively expressed in human language.

The New Testament writers are so thrilled about uncovering some of the mystery of God's will for the church that they use language freely as the instrument to communicate this excitement to the readers. This language is useful to us as readers only insofar as we attempt to connect with the cause of the excitement that produced it in the first place.

To recapture the cause of the excitement is to recapture a grand design for ministry. The church, as God's people and as the prolonged presence of Jesus on earth, is depicted as a vital instrument to promote God's justice, compassion, grace, and salvation to the world. No wonder the New Testament writers left no stone unturned in their

attempts to communicate this important task to the church.

The images for the church in the New Testament were chosen for the purpose of propelling God's people to mission and ministry and thereby making available to others the same grace that God had shared with them.

The second reminder is more sobering. Images and metaphors can be misused. Minear graciously states that "...an image does not remain the same when used to achieve an alien objective" (p. 225).

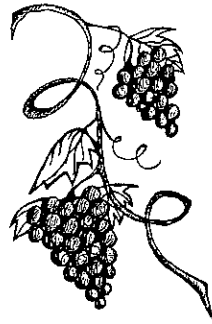
This, we realize, is an understatement. When the objective is *alien* the image changes, i.e., the same image can mean different things when it is used for differing objectives. We have too many examples of this truth: the cult in Los Angeles using the image of *Heaven's Gate* as a justification for mass suicide; militia movements using the *People of God* image as an excuse for white supremacy racism; the use of the *Holy Nation* image to justify the massacre of Moslems during the time of the Crusades; the *Army of God* image to defend the conquest of Latin America and the slaughter of millions of aboriginal people.

Yes, we are aware that the nature of the images changes when they are used for alien objectives. Neither the images nor the objectives they point to are shapeless. Both are purposeful. There is coherence and authority in the midst of creativity and imagination.

Ironically, the best guard against the misuse of images is the proper functioning of the truth that they point to. That is, when the church properly functions as the church, then the discernment of the Spirit will militate against the misuse of the images that define it. That continues to be our challenge as we discern what it means to be the *Mennonite* church in Canada in the twenty-first century.

*Robert J. Suderman*





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## *From the foreword*

The document in your hands celebrates the potential of the church as taught by New Testament writers. We are pleased to make this resource available to you. Small groups have worked diligently to understand images used in the Bible and to suggest ways in which the intentions of these images might be taught and lived out in our congregations.

There are at least sixty additional images used by New Testament writers that can continue to deepen our understanding of the nature and the responsibility of the church in our world. We commend further investigation to all worship leaders, pastors, and persons concerned with communicating the meaning of being “church” to our people.  
—**Robert J. Suderman**, *executive secretary, Resources Commission, Conference of Mennonites in Canada.*



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