

# PEACE Sunday 2015

Written by James Long and Michael Blair of Bethesda Mennonite Church and Samuel Voth Schrag of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship, on behalf of the City on a Hill Committee made up of members of both congregations.

## Key texts

Luke 19:1-10  
Philippians 2:5-8  
Ephesians 2:2-10, 14-22  
Galatians 3:28  
Jeremiah 10

Along with Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Church USA celebrates Peace Sunday the Sunday closest to the International Day of Prayer for Peace, which is Sept. 21. **However, you may use these materials any Sunday that works for your congregation.**



Speaking against racial injustice  
in the church and as the church.

## Introduction

In May 2015, the executive director of Mennonite Church USA, Ervin Stutzman, and moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht wrote a letter on behalf of Mennonite Church USA.

*“Our hearts have been broken as we’ve watched racial tensions break out in violence on the streets of our nation, most recently in the cities of Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore. Like a cauldron of hot water finally boiling over, the deep frustration of continued injustices against communities of color have spilled into the streets. Too often, these communities suffer from joblessness, substandard housing, poor education, and an unjust law enforcement system. Police brutality against black men is fueled by racism coupled with the increased militarization of the police force. As a church called to grow as ‘communities of grace, joy and peace,’ we must not ignore the systemic realities of racism in our country.”*

<http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/how-can-we-be-silent-a-letter-from-erwin-stutzman-and-elizabeth-soto-albrecht/>

In the face of injustice, the church is called to confession for where we have fallen short, to repentance and transformation in light of God’s vision, and to testimony to the world about God’s way of peace, where all are treated with love and justice. So, this Peace Sunday, we call churches to spend time reflecting on race, and the ways our society is set up to discriminate.

We know that talking about race is fraught with difficulty. We have offered sermon seeds and Scripture suggestions that lead to different levels of tension and different kinds of conversations. We hope there are some that are right for your congregation.

But we also offer these resources as a challenge. These resources were written by two congregations in St. Louis who have spent a lot of time learning from one another, reaching across differences of race, culture and theology to discover what God is doing in their midst.

We encourage everyone who uses these resources to also stretch beyond their comfort zone, and to engage with congregations that are different from them. This might include consulting with a congregation from a different tradition in planning the worship service, bringing in a guest speaker with a different racial/ethnic background, or having a joint worship service with a congregation with a very different worship style or theology. We believe that building relationships is more important than intellectual knowledge.

Service resources include Scripture suggestions and sermon “seeds” to go along with them, children’s story suggestions, options for prayers of confession, hymn suggestions, and some options for further research.

## Sermon seeds

### Luke 19:1-10: “Jesus and Zacchaeus”

In the Roman Empire, the tax collectors were charged with raising money from the poor. The Empire didn’t ask too many questions about where the money came from. So Jesus called the tax collectors like Zacchaeus to repentance, to look at the poor with mercy and with justice.

In the same way, in too many cities in our country, government does not serve the poor. Traffic tickets serve as a money-making mechanism. The prison industrial complex makes money off of the bodies of poor black men. There is too much money tied up in systems of justice, and *Christians are called to a better way*. As Jimi Hendrix said, “When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.” We are called to Christ’s way of peace.

- <http://mcc.org/stories/unjust-incarceration>
- <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/06/us/ferguson-missouri-racism-tickets-fines/>
- <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/304669/>

### Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind among you, that was yours in Christ.”

Jesus did not look at differences between people. He saw that all people had one need—God’s salvation. *The people of God are the ones who should have the mind of Christ*, and should see people as God sees them. God sees people as sinners in need of salvation, as sheep without a shepherd. As the people of God, if we saw people as God sees them, we wouldn’t become trapped by the false divisions of race and class. The Black Lives Matter movement is about the desire to be seen with equality. With the mind of Christ, we see people with a different kind of love—love that overcomes fear, celebrates the diversity in the human family, and challenges us to real relationships with Jesus and with one another.

- <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>
- <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/when-there-is-no-peace-where-are-the-saints/>

### Ephesians 2:2-10, 14-22; Galatians 3:28: “Tear down the dividing wall.”

The apostle Paul was focused on breaking down barriers that prevented God’s dream from being realized. He spent a lot of time talking about breaking down dividing walls and about community reconciliation. We know that there are deep dividing walls in our communities. Our cities are segregated, our jails are segregated, and our churches are segregated. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11 o’clock on Sunday morning.” (Sermon, National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., March 31, 1968)

*The church is called to fight against these walls*, in the name of Christ and his peace.

- <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/03/21st-century-segregation-divided-race>
- [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/on-racial-issues-america-is-divided-both-black-and-white-and-red-and-blue/2014/12/26/3d2964c8-8d12-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/on-racial-issues-america-is-divided-both-black-and-white-and-red-and-blue/2014/12/26/3d2964c8-8d12-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58_story.html)

## Jeremiah 10: “The false idolatry of race”

Christians through the years have created a false idol—an image of God that looks like us. In the Sistine Chapel, God is an old white man, and some of the most famous images of Jesus reflect a tall, light skinned, blue-eyed man with a beard and long brown hair.

While all people can represent Jesus—after all, we are God’s hands and feet in the world—the historical Jesus would not be called white in the United States today.

*We worship a God who was embodied in a person of color.* When we are suspicious of people who look different, when we close our borders to immigrants, when we participate in a system that discriminates against people of color, we discriminate against God. *How would it change us if we remembered daily that the face of Christ does not look exactly like the church that sits around us on Sunday morning?*

- <http://www.femonite.com/2013/08/01/iris-de-leon-hartshorn-communities-of-hope-a-sermon-on-trayvon-martin-race-and-privilege/>
- <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/19/165473220/color-of-christ-a-story-of-race-and-religion-in-america>
- <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/12/insisting-jesus-was-white-is-bad-history-and-bad-theology/282310/>

## Mennonite story suggestions

These stories would fit in any sermon.

### Vincent Harding

Dr. Vincent Harding was a Mennonite pastor and a confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His life is a testimony to how the church can call for justice. But it is also a cautionary tale, as fellow Mennonites often failed to follow Harding’s call for justice. *Mennonite Life* has a wonderful exploration of his legacy in their summer 2015 issue.

- <http://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-69/>
- <https://themennonite.org/feature/vincent-harding-dont-get-weary-though-way-long/>
- <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/honoring-the-life-of-dr-vincent-harding/>
- <http://www.jesusradicals.com/iconocast/vincent-harding>

### Sundown towns

Many Mennonite churches in rural areas are in “sundown towns”—places where, historically, it was illegal and unsafe for Black Americans to spend the night. Goshen, Indiana, home of Goshen College, is one important example. It is a classic example of how Mennonites have benefited from systems of sin.

- <http://mennoworld.org/2014/01/20/feature/portrait-of-a-sundown-town/>
- <http://mennoworld.org/2015/04/20/news/goshen-residents-instigate-sundown-town-resolution/>

### Justice in the land

Mennonites have often farmed land that was taken by force just a few years before from Native people. We have rarely connected our land with the violence that brought it to us. But when we take advantage of systems of violence, we work against God’s vision of Jubilee.

- <https://mcc.org/stories/doctrine-discovery>
- <http://mcc.org/stories/mennonites-unsettled-native-american-history>
- <http://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-61-no-2/article/mennonites-and-native-americans-a-reconciliation/>

### Other resources

Mennonite Church USA Director of Transformative Peacemaking, Iris de Leon-Hartshorn

- <http://mennoniteusa.org/tag/iris-de-leon-hartshorn/>

Communities of Hope team, Mennonite Church USA

- <http://mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/peacebuilding/communities-of-hope/>

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Anti-Oppression Coordinator, Ewuare Osayande

- <http://truepeaceisjustice.org/>

Roots of Justice

- <http://rootsofjusticetraining.org/>

**We also encourage you to explore local conference connections.**

## Peace and Justice Support Network

For peace and justice resources, or to join the Peace and Justice Support Network, visit [www.PJSN.org](http://www.PJSN.org), or check us out on Facebook.

For more information about PJSN, or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material, contact [Peace@MennoniteUSA.org](mailto:Peace@MennoniteUSA.org).

Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thank you for your support.

## Order of service

### Call to worship suggestion

One: We gather to worship together.

**All: Different people, different lives, different histories,**

One: Yet all children of the same Parent,

**All: Created lovingly by the Source of all life!**

One: We gather to reconnect with one another.

**All: Different people, different lives, different histories,**

One: Yet all disciples of one Teacher,

**All: Jesus, the Word made flesh, dwelling among us.**

One: We gather with different joys and sorrows, different hopes and fears ...

**All: Different people, different lives, different histories,**

One: Yet one people with one God, one faith, one baptism.

**All: Let us open ourselves to the presence of God at work in us, among us, and through us.**

### Children's story ideas

*The Sandwich Swap*, by Queen Rania of Jordan

*We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song*, by Debbie Levy

*Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, by Doreen Rappaport

### Constructing the church together

Bring a big box full of tools, and have each child come and grab a tool, then have them tell what it is used for. Talk about how they all are different, and that they all have different functions, but there is one tool box. That's like us—we are all different colors, have different traditions and ways of doing things, and we have different ways of talking and being. But we are all part of God's tool box, and every tool has to work together to build up God's house. When tools are being left out, and aren't being used well, then the house is not as strong.

### People from every tongue and tribe and nation: Revelation 7:9

Collect pictures of people from all different countries from magazines, or print them from the Internet.

### Guest speaker

Invite a guest speaker who is not from the dominant culture of your congregation to share stories of their experience of race.

### Hymn(s)

*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, No. 579: "Lift every voice and sing"

"I Need You to Survive" (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/hezekiahwalker/ineedyoutosurvive.html>)

*Sing the Journey*, No. 4: "You've got a place (Welcome table)"

*Sing the Journey*, No. 52: "Jesus, help us live in peace (Unity)"

*Sing the Journey*, No. 49: "Rain down"

*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, No. 306: "In Christ there is no East or West"



Peace and Justice  
Support Network

Toll-free: 866.866.2872  
[www.MennoniteMission.net](http://www.MennoniteMission.net)



Relief, development and peace  
in the name of Christ

Toll-free 888.563.4676  
[mcc.org](http://mcc.org)