

WORSHIP RESOURCES

*for Evangelism and Church Planting Sunday,
April 19, 1998*

Introduction:

Following are ideas that will help you plan for your worship celebration on Church Planting and Evangelism Sunday, April 19, 1998. The lectionary scriptures for that Sunday are Psalm 150, Acts 5:27-32, Revelation 1:4-8, and John 20:19-31. The following helps are taken from these scriptures or are related to them. You will find suggestions for a call to worship, hymns, children's story, sermon thoughts, sermon illustrations, and the sending. As you prepare, may God grant you the mind, spirit, and peace of Jesus Christ.

Call to Worship:

Option A:

Leader: We gather in the Name of Jesus Christ.

PEOPLE: TO WORSHIP, TO FELLOWSHIP, TO HEAR GOD'S WORD.

Leader: Sharpen our ears, O Lord,

PEOPLE: TO HEAR THE CRIES OF THOSE WHO NEED YOUR LOVE AND LOOK FOR IT TO COME THROUGH US;

Leader: Sharpen our minds, O Christ,

PEOPLE: THAT WE MAY DISCOVER YOUR LABOR FOR US IN YOUR WORLD;

Leader: Sharpen our faith, O Master,

PEOPLE: THAT WE MAY LEAVE FEARS AND CARES BEHIND;

Leader: and boldly share your love and peace,

PEOPLE: IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Option B: Call to Worship from "Vision: Healing and Hope"

Leader: God calls us

RESPONSE: TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST,

Leader: God calls us by the power of the Holy Spirit,

RESPONSE: TO GROW AS COMMUNITIES OF GRACE, JOY AND PEACE, SO THAT GOD'S HEALING AND HOPE FLOW THROUGH US TO THE WORLD.

Option C: Lectionary scripture: Psalm 150



Hymns That Relate to the Scriptures and Theme from *Hymnal, A Worship Book*:

- "Jesus, stand among us," 25
- "Come, thou Almighty King," 41
- "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," 37
- "Here in this place," 6
- "Here I am, Lord," 395
- "Renew your church," 363
- "Breathe on me, breath of God," 356
- "Spirit of the living God," 349
- "You are salt" 226
- "God of grace and God of glory," 366
- "This little light of mine," 401
- "Move in our midst," 418

Children's Story:

Option A: Have someone (a founding member, if possible) tell how your church was started. Stress how God gave the courage and boldness that was needed.

Option B: Story based on an experience at Guelph Mennonite Church, Ontario, as told by Hugo Neufeld, mission minister for Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada:

"Hey, Jeremy, Mom and Dad say people in our church are talking about a plan to get more people to come out to our services."

"They've tried before, Becky, and I still don't have even one friend my age in Sunday school. Church is getting boring."

"Dad says that this time everyone seems to want to get involved, even Mrs. Kruikshank. They are asking all of the kids to help. You know that colorful new flyer about our church?"

"You mean the one where I drew the funny picture about little Christine trying to throw a bowling ball down the alley at our social?"

"Yes, that's the one. Our church is going to take this flyer to every person living near the church."

"It's not going to work, Becky. They've tried that before."

"What are you talking about, children? What's not going to work?"

"Oh, Mom, I don't like church anymore. There's no one my age."

"You know what, we have a plan. Tomorrow we all get together to pray and then on Saturday all of us, including you children, will help hand out 3,000 brochures about a special worship series—and look, the picture you drew is right on the front page."

And so almost the entire church got together and spent their Saturday going from house to house. Adults, children, and youth told people about their congregation. Through the

brochure they invited neighbors to a special four-week focus in worship and Sunday school on the theme, "If Jesus were to come to our city today."

Many people were quite friendly, some were simply polite, but some pointed to the sign that hadn't been noticed, "No junk mail."

Everyone at church was all excited and prepared, they thought, to accept new people. Extra chairs were set up. Everyone was to be a special greeter. There was plenty of juice and coffee and tea. And yes, Dad had baked some of his special blueberry muffins.

The first Sunday, not one new person showed up. What a disappointment!

The second Sunday was the same. "We did all this for nothing," grumbled Jeremy.

When no new people showed up the third Sunday, the congregation forgot what they had prayed for, and Jeremy complained, "I still don't have a friend in church."

On the last Sunday of the series, no one bothered to put up extra chairs. The service had just begun when Jeremy saw a woman with two small children come in, whom he hadn't seen before. She seemed a little frustrated, not easily finding a place to sit. Everyone seemed to be looking at her, and finally someone scrambled to put up some extra chairs.

Right behind her Jeremy spied another new family coming, and guess what, there was a boy who seemed to be just his age. "Move over, Mom," he whispered. "They can sit here beside us."

That was a happy day for Jeremy. He quickly made friends with Carlos, who never missed a Sunday from that day on. Carlos was Hispanic and had recently come from Mexico. His parents had not grown up in a church, but just before they moved to Canada, they had both become Christians. They had noticed the brochure that emphasized Christian, Anabaptist principles of peace and love, and of living out one's faith.

Not long after that Jeremy and Becky overheard their parents talking in the kitchen.

"You know, we were so confident that our church could grow. We prayed and worked hard to bring new people. But when God didn't answer our prayers immediately, we gave up and weren't quite prepared to receive new people. I'm glad we had a chance to make them feel welcome after the service."

Becky and Jeremy looked at each other and smiled. And Mom and Dad overheard Jeremy say, "At least I now have a good friend in church."

Prayer Suggestion:

Give thanks for the 28 emerging churches and for the 35 churches that have joined area conferences since the 1992 triennial sessions, when the General Conference set the goal of establishing 50 new churches by 2001.

See prayer requests in the Abraham and Sarah Prayerletter. Give thanks for a faithful prayer support network for our new churches.

Sermon Outline, based on Acts 5:27-32 and John 20:19-31

Holy Boldness

Today is Evangelism and Church Planting Sunday. *Evangelism* is a good word with a bad reputation. Even though Jesus told his followers to go into all the world and share the gospel, many people today are fearful of doing so.

A. Give an illustration or list reasons for fear.

B. In Acts 5, the apostles have good reasons for fear. (Share story, verses 12-28) Peter and the apostles responded to their accusers, "We must obey God rather than people." It takes holy boldness to obey God rather than people—to be God pleasers rather than people pleasers. Where does this boldness come from? How can we have more of this "holy boldness"?

A. We receive a hint from verse 32, in which Peter and the apostles testify that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God. The Holy Spirit empowers for mission.

B. We see an example of this in the Gospel lesson for today, John 20:19-31. The disciples are huddled behind closed doors. They are fearful, unable to share the good news of the living Christ. Then Jesus appears and gives them a mission, a purpose for their lives. He commissions them, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." With the mission he gives them a gift that will empower them to fulfill the mission. He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." They go out with a holy boldness which we see in our Acts 5 text. They testify that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God. Let us look at some examples of present-day people, churches, and conferences who with the help of the Holy Spirit have overcome doubts and fears and have participated in evangelism and church planting with holy boldness.

A. Share illustrations from your own life or from the examples which follow in the illustration section.

B. Like Thomas, in our text from John 20, we often have doubts and fears about situations where we can't see everything clearly and know positively what the outcomes will be. However, the promise in our texts for today is that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey. The Holy Spirit empowers us for mission.

C. Close by giving a prayer of thanksgiving that, as we obey God, the Holy Spirit gives us a holy boldness so that we can share the love and peace of Christ in our world.

Evangelism and Church Planting Illustrations and Stories To Use in Sermon or in Other Parts of the Service:

It was a spring weekend in 1997 when the Evangelism and Church Development Committee of Central District Conference met together for a routine meeting. The following story, told as a devotional meditation, poignantly portrayed the opportunity at hand.

"Andy, an autistic child in a special-need class at a local middle school, had a particular need for routine. Before entering the classroom, he would peer through the door to determine if each and every classmate was present and in their proper place. The teacher and each aide also needed to be in sight.

"If the room was changed in any way, or someone was absent, Andy refused to enter. He remained in the hallway, rolling on the floor, traumatized by what he could not predict through the doorway. Often the teacher needed to offer physical assistance to get him to move.

"At times, Andy would gather enough courage to step onto the threshold. Often he desperately grabbed the casement with both hands, rigidly stuck in the opening, frozen in place.

"When Andy realized he had no choice but to enter, he lunged through the door, making a beeline toward his desk."

As we together reflected on this story, we asked: What do we as a church see as we peer through the doorway of our present? What is God calling us to as we enter the 21st century? What will result if we roll on the floor in the hallway, stuck in our past, refusing to believe that life leads us to the future? What will happen if we live in the present, but remain rigidly stuck in this reality, unable to free ourselves to meet the future? What can happen if we, however reluctantly or impulsively, cross the threshold and grasp the opportunities for our future? These questions vividly portrayed the options for the committee.

Marilyn Miller, staff person from the Commission on Home Ministries, led the committee in understanding *Natural Church Development: A Guide to 8 Essential Qualities of a Healthy Church*, by Christian Schwarz (ChurchSmart Resources, 1996). From our study, conversation, and prayer emerged a mission statement that thrust us through the doorway into the future.

"Every Central District Conference congregation will become a more spiritually healthy and growing congregation that:

1. partners with...
2. gives birth to...
3. develops leaders for...

...Anabaptist outreach ministries and/or new congregations within the Central District Conference."

A holy moment was experienced by the committee when this mission statement was articulated. A hush swept through the room, followed by a unanimous "AMEN!" Since then, the Central District Conference Board of Directors and committees endorsed the statement with both programming and budget priorities. We boldly proclaim that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way He personally revealed it" John 20:31 (Peterson). What wonderful opportunities are ours as we allow Jesus to lead us through the doorway of our present!

—Lloyd L. Miller, Conference Minister, Central District Conference

Crossroads Community Church is a church plant sponsored by the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia. We will be celebrating the third anniversary of our "kick off" Sunday in April of 1998. Part of our vision statement says that Crossroads wants to be a "relevant and reproducing cell church." By reproducing we mean, among other things, we want to be a church that plants other churches. This has been part of our heart right from the beginning. We believe that more people will be reached with the good news of Jesus Christ by two smaller churches than one larger church.

Last year (1996) Crossroads leadership team began to talk about how this part of our vision should be worked out. We began to sense that God was calling us to plant a daughter church. During the subsequent discussions, many questions were raised. Why so soon? Why not wait until we are bigger? What about finances, after all, aren't we on subsidy and operating in a line of credit? Can we afford to lose any people? Is the timing right? These were all valid questions, but what do you do when you feel God is calling? You go ahead and do it and trust him to provide!

On February 28, 1998, Crossroads will give birth to a daughter named Peace Community Church. Approximately 20 adults will begin a new congregation under the leadership of Brian and Deb Ens. This is a step of faith for us in response to God's call. Were all the questions answered? No! Are we big enough? We presently are a congregation averaging 165 and we're sending out 25, including children. Can we afford it? We are still operating in a line of credit! Will we feel the loss of the people? Yes, that is natural. Is the timing right? From a human perspective it would be easy to convince ourselves to wait, but

isn't that often the case when it comes to stepping out in faith in response to God's call. The bottom line is God is calling and our desire is to be faithful. As we are, He will provide for all our needs. It is going to be an exciting year as we watch our baby grow and as we wait to see how God will provide for both mother and daughter.

—Doug Epp, Crossroads Community Church

"The word *evangelism* certainly doesn't deserve such a bad reputation. It's actually a wonderful, joyful word that comes from two Greek words, *eu* (pronounced "you"), which means "good," and *aggellion* (pronounced "on-GEH-le-on"), which means "message" or "news." The ancient Greeks used the word evangelism to mean giving people back home the good news that their city's troops had won a battle. They also used this word to describe other kinds of good news that brought joy to the hearer."

—*Me, an Evangelist* by William J. McKay, p. 8

Reid Carpenter, president of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, told a group of Mennonites: "As a people, you undervalue or underestimate yourselves. I am troubled that you seem so intimidated as a people. Yet, very few people know as much about reconciliation, community, justice as you do." If as Carpenter says, we are intimidated, what can give us a new boldness?

A humbling quote for the theme: "Holy Boldness." At the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1958, honor was paid to Berggrav of Norway, Niemoller of Germany, Ordass of Hungary, Lilje of Germany, Kagawa of Japan, Kiivit of Estonia, all Christian leaders who had suffered persecution and imprisonment for their faith. Addressing the assembly, Bishop J. Bromley Oxnam said, "In deep humility, I must confess that my faith has cost me nothing. Nothing! I have never suffered for the faith. I have never been hungry. I have never been in prison. I have never had a stone thrown at me. I have not been persecuted. My faith cost me nothing. I was born in a free land and possess a freedom won for me by my fathers. I have inherited a faith for which others died. I have read of faggot and lash for the goodly company of martyrs, but for me, it has been too much a matter of appropriating the benefits of Calvary rather than of sharing in Calvary. I bow in respectful homage before my colleagues in this presence who know the meaning of the prison cell, of fetters, of hunger."

"We sincerely seek the salvation of all humankind, not only at the cost of our possessions but also at the cost of our life-blood."

—Menno Simons

First thought that comes to mind about boldness:

The camera focuses on a futuristic spacecraft against the background of distant galaxies. The narrator's profound voice announces the mandate, "Space—the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission—to explore strange, new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone."

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

—Ambrose Redmoon

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

—Reinhold Niebuhr

"You can't test courage cautiously."

"Whatever you do, or dream, begin it now. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."

—Goethe

"I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly God was speaking: "My name is I am." I waited and God continued: "When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not 'I was.' When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not 'I will be.' When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I am."

—Helen Mellincost

"The only difference between fear and adventure is how much you breathe."

—Rob Kalnitsky

"Faith is not a refuge from reality. It is a demand that we face reality, with all its difficulties, opportunities, and implications. The true subject matter of religion is not our own little souls, but the Eternal God and his whole mysterious purpose, and our solemn responsibility to him."

—Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), *The School of Charity*

An imaginative exercise: Imagine, if you and a few friends went to an area where no one had ever seen a church or heard about the Christian way. What would you do? How would you share the gospel? What response would you expect? What would you do with the people who believed you? What would the church look like? What would you sing? What would you say? What would you do?

"In the 1940s and 50s, the Indiana-Michigan conference began a church-planting movement with the influence of J.D. Graber—EACH CONGREGATION BEGIN AN OUTPOST. During those two decades, the number of congregations almost doubled and the membership of the conference doubled. This vision released a spiritual dynamic in the conference that for those two decades brought much fruit. Today we understand much more about church planting than we did back in the 40s and 50s. Can we capture and apply the same vision today?"

—Cal Kaufman, "Central States Vision: Healing and Hope"

"The church that has stopped birthing has decided to die."

—Kennon Callahan

Slogan for Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference:

"Every church a mother church"

"The constant infusion of new Christians into our fellowship is required to keep alive the spiritual vitality which characterized the early church."

—Lyle Schaller

A TESTIMONY FROM MEMBERS OF A CHURCH-PLANTING EXPERIENCE:

"Lola and I spent all but two years of our first 50 years as part of a traditional Mennonite church fellowship. This was a good, solid, Christian foundation that was laid for both of us. However, it wasn't until the Lord led us to be part of a church-planting experience in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, that we really experienced the joy of serving the Lord as was experienced by the New Testament church as we read it in Acts 2:46-47.

"Family of Faith Mennonite Church is a cell-based, New Testament fellowship that puts emphasis on living out Christ through our lives, in our communities, on our street! By intentionally and genuinely listening, sharing our faith, caring as He would, building relationships with those on our street, we have had numerous opportunities to share the Lord and bring to people his peace and hope, as we take responsibility of living out Christ's love to those around us as the "early church" and the Anabaptists did before us.

"We have attempted to reach out to those in need of the Lord on our street through pot luck meals, ladies' teas, Easter service in our yard, garage sales, cell groups, etc., to be a light to shine out of the darkness in this troubled world.

"Our lives have been enriched and blessed as the Lord continues to answer prayer as we attempt to intentionally add to the kingdom for our Lord and give him the honor and glory."

—Jim Suderman

The Sending:

Option A:

Leader: In response to what we have heard and to what we know ourselves to be, let us move out into our world with a new boldness.

PEOPLE: WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST'S MISSION.

Leader: The Lord has given us the responsibility of living and speaking the Word in our world.

PEOPLE: LET US OFFER OURSELVES TO GOD AND TO THAT WORLD, WHICH IS GOD'S OWN.

Leader: And may the grace and peace of our Lord be with us all. Amen.

PEOPLE: AMEN

Option B. May the spirit which was in Christ Jesus be in us, enabling us to know God's will and empowering us to do God's will. Amen.

Option C. Page 755, *Hymnal, a Worship Book*

Ways To Highlight the Mission Theme:

1. Ask a newer Christian to share a testimony—someone who can help the congregation sense anew the transformation that Christ brings when he comes into one's life and how the faithful witness of the community of believers is instrumental in the process.
2. Point to an empty pew in your church. Ask those attending the service to each think of one unchurched acquaintance who could be sitting in that empty spot next Sunday—a person who could profit from becoming part of the church family and whose presence would enrich the life of the congregation. Allow a few moments of silence for reflection. Then invite them to pray this week for the persons they have thought of and invite them to church.
3. Sensory media in worship can help people enter into the mood or theme. For Church Planting Sunday, you may want to use the poster produced by the Commission on Home

Ministries, "New churches. Sharing the light." On it you will see stylized candles with names of the various church plants in North America. If your congregation appreciates activities such as this, place a large container with clean sand on a table at the front of the church. Have one large candle burning standing in the sand with enough candles in a tray. As the worship leader reads out the names and locations of the church plants, have participants come forward lighting one candle for each church. Start from the middle and work out. Since the candle lighting will take longer than reading the names, sing a hymn while the lighting continues.

4. Invite a church planter or a group of members of a new church in your conference or district to share the excitement and challenges of starting a new church. Questions can be asked by both the newer and the older congregation to each other on how mission is happening.

Resources:

For congregations interested in church revitalization and growth: *Natural Church Development by Christian Schwarz:* The author has done extensive research worldwide and found that healthy growing churches seem to share eight quality characteristics. These characteristics are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. Order from ChurchSmart; call 1-800-253-4276.

For congregations interested in possibly birthing a new church:

Videos: *Planting New Churches: Reaching Out in New Ways*, produced by Church of the Brethren, and *Back to the Future: Church Parenting...A Strategy for the 21st Century*. These videos can be borrowed from the Resource Centre, Conference of Mennonites in Canada (phone: 204-888-6781; e-mail: cmc@confmenno.ca) or Marilyn Miller (phone: 303-499-1565; e-mail: 76042.1141@compuserve.com).

For congregations interested in Living in Faithful Evangelism (LIFE):

A new revised LIFE process is available for use in your congregation beginning September, 1998. Alumni LIFE churches can enroll in a 13-week module of your choice. Congregations that have not previously gone through the LIFE process can enroll in a revised two-year process. For more information contact Marilyn Miller (phone: 303-499-1565; e-mail: 76042.1141@compuserve.com), Jack Suderman (phone: 204-888-6781; e-mail: RJSuderman@confmenno.ca), or Ed Bontrager (phone: 757-595-6889).

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