



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Formation

600 Shaftesbury Blvd
Winnipeg MB R3P 0M4
Toll free 1-866-888-6785
P: 204-888-6781
F: 204-831-5675
E: office@mennonitechurch.ca
www.mennonitechurch.ca

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Worship Resources for

World Communion Sunday

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Introduction

World Communion Sunday is an opportunity for the wider Christian Church to move beyond historical and theological differences and worship together in active hope of genuine unity in Christ. Communion may be the worship activity where walls that separate Christians from each other remain the highest. While we all recognize this table as being hosted by our Lord, we may hold firmly to our understandings of how that table is set and who is welcome at it to protect the treasures of our differing Eucharistic theologies. But, does this contradict our Lord's prayer for unity in John 17? This year's World Communion Sunday worship resource is built on the example of Communion in the Taizé Community, a community that has learned how to welcome and include Christians from many denominations in its Communion service.

Taizé is an ecumenical Christian community started almost 50 years ago in France. The community is inspired by the monastic traditions and is guided by the values of the Beatitudes: joy, simplicity and mercy. One of their main thrusts is to work toward reconciliation among Christian traditions. Their founder, Brother Roger Schutz-Marsauche, considered the division of Christ's body to be scandalous. He believed that for the Church to be a leaven of community and peace in the broader human family Christians had to be visibly reconciled among themselves.

Taizé prayer is characterized by simple reflective songs that are cyclical and repetitive, to allow for deep meditation. They are often sung in Latin or in several different languages to maintain a sense of universality. The songs set the tone for periods of silent reflection, of up to 10 minutes duration. Prayerful silence can often be more eloquent than many words, especially when undertaken in a worshipping community. To find out more about Taizé, see www.taize.fr.

Communion in Taizé prayer includes the practice of offering blessed bread alongside the consecrated elements as an act of hospitality towards those who are not yet comfortable participating fully in the Christian Eucharistic symbols or in the Christian community of believers. Since Mennonites are less sacramental and regularly receive bread which has been blessed with a prayer for communion, this service follows the pattern of offering two kinds of communion elements, but adds elements that are visually different. It offers bread and wine for baptized believers and grapes and crackers for people who have not yet demonstrated their choice to follow Jesus in baptism. Since sharing food is at the heart of Jesus' hospitality, this worship resource seeks to honour the re-covenanting significance of the Lord's Supper for believers while welcoming all who desire table fellowship with Jesus and his church.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11

Preparation for worship:

- To minimize the amount of talking in the service itself, the worship bulletin could carry a short explanation about World Communion Sunday. For example:

Today is World Communion Sunday. All around the world other Christians are gathering with us and celebrating some form of this most foundational Christian liturgy. Whatever the format, whatever diversity is coming to the table, today we are partaking in a world-wide wave of kneelers and prayers and drinkers and eaters who love, remember, and try to follow our same Lord Jesus. Together we are the Church, the body of Christ in our world. Jesus, who so often broke bread with his friends, is our host. He, the Bread of Life, sustains the Church, and lovingly invites the worthy and the unworthy into the community of believers.

- Visual elements enrich the service for many worshippers and can also replace many words with an image. Candles are a universal symbol in the Christian tradition, so use a Christ candle on this Sunday, surrounded by a selection of grapes, a chalice of wine, crackers, and pita bread.
- Although the Taizé songs appear simple, learning and sight-reading are not conducive to the worshipful tone of the service. If a core group from the congregation could learn the songs and harmonies in advance, they would provide valuable support to the singing. The descant portions on some songs need to be assigned to soloists in advance. The hymnal accompaniment books provide instrumental parts, as well as additional verses and melodies to be sung alongside the ostinato lines. Instrumentalists of all skill levels can easily be included in this worship service.
- The bread in Jesus' day was likely some form of flat bread. Flatbreads are ubiquitous across many world cultures, so using pita bread for the Lord's Supper also symbolizes the inter-cultural nature of communion.
- Use a format for serving communion on this special Sunday that invites participants to come forward to receive the elements from the servers in solidarity with the communion practice which is common in the wider Christian Church.
- An element in this particular service which will be unfamiliar for some congregations is inviting all who are present to the table. This needs to be explained and agreed upon in advance, preferably a Sunday or two in advance. The words of invitation to the table (see order of service below) explain that baptized believers receive bread and wine, and unbaptized receive a grape and a cracker. The distinction is made to recognize the significance of the Lord's Supper for those who are renewing their baptismal covenants with Christ and the Church, as described in Mennonite Confessions of Faith, while recognizing that Christ, the host of this table, invites all to dine with him and follow him. With this differentiated ritual, the church aligns itself with Christ's welcome of people on all the stages of the spiritual journey that precede baptism by offering them a clear place at his table.

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 19; Matthew 21:33-46; Philippians 3:4b-14

Sermon ideas:

The Isaiah passage describes God's frustration at cultivating his vineyard (God's people) with such care only to receive a yield of sour fruit instead of peace and justice. The sermon could foster reflection on the type of fruit our church is yielding in today's world.

The Matthew passage reprimands the religious leaders of the day for thinking that they "owned" God's truth. It is a reminder of how violence (or rhetoric) can escalate when, in the name of religious convictions, one begins to exclude others from God's abundance and grace (represented by the vineyard). Both passages illustrate how people can be blind to God's continued grace and care.

The Taizé website has scripture-based writings by the brothers in the community which might serve as basis for a meditation. See www.taize.fr. Tom Yoder Neufeld's recent reflections on Communion are available on pages 34-40 of *Built to Last: Jesus Christ as Ground and Goal* at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/522.

You can also use World Communion Sunday as an opportunity to reflect with the congregation on the meaning of this practice in the Mennonite experience. This might mean reflecting on some of the other meals Jesus hosted, such as the feeding of the 5000, the wedding at Cana, as well as the Jewish significance of the Passover meal, and the meaning of these meals for our Communion practice.

Order of Service

Opening Words	<i>Welcome visitors, make announcements and offer any instructions about the service.</i>
Silence	<i>Light candles.</i>
Greeting	Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit be with you all <i>People: And also with you</i> Leader: Let us greet each other with the Peace of Christ <i>Worshippers greet each other individually with:</i> "The peace of Christ be with you." "And also with you."
Opening Song	STS 12 <i>Magnificat</i>
Psalm/Alleluia	HWB 101 <i>Alleluia</i> Psalm 19 (<i>selected portions interspersed with Alleluia</i>) <i>Alleluia</i>
Song	HWB 452 <i>Ubi caritas</i>
Gospel Reading	Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon	<i>see sermon ideas</i>
Preparation for Communion	Leader prays the words from HWB 703, pausing after each sentence and inviting the people to respond with HWB 152 Kyrie . The prayer can continue with additional intercessions that are followed by the sung Kyrie and concluded with a corporate Amen.
Song	STS 79 Holy Spirit Come to Us
Silence	<i>5 – 7 minutes</i>
Communion prayer and Lord's Prayer	<i>As per p. 75-77 in Minister's Manual</i> Optional: sing HWB 554 <i>Our Father, who art in heaven</i>
Invitation to the Table	<i>Replace "It is the Lord's table, and all who are baptized are invited to it" with the following invitation:</i> Leader: This is the Lord's table and all who wish to partake in it are welcome. Those who have been baptized upon confession of faith are invited to renew that covenant by receiving bread and wine, those who have not yet been baptized are invited to respond to Jesus' hospitality by receiving a grape and cracker. Therefore let us come in faith, knowing our weakness, renouncing our sin, trusting in Christ, seeking his grace. Alternative words of invitation are available at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/561
Words of Institution and distribution of elements	<i>As per p. 77-78 in Minister's Manual</i> (During communion the congregation or a small group may sing HWB 471 <i>Eat this bread</i> , HWB 247 <i>Jesus, remember me</i> , and HWB 113 <i>O Christe Domine Jesu</i> .)
Concluding Prayer	<i>HWB 789</i> (Change the phrase of this prayer, which reads "we are members of the body of Christ" with "for our part in the family of God.")
Closing song/Benediction	If HWB 113 <i>O Christe Domine Jesu</i> was sung during communion, conclude with <i>HWB 204 Gloria</i> ; if not conclude with <i>HWB 294 Dona nobis pacem domino</i>

This worship resource was written for Mennonite Church Canada by Michele Rizoli, a M. Divinity student at Toronto School of Theology who worships at Toronto United Mennonite Church. Edited by Elsie Rempel. Direct your comments about Special Sunday Worship Resources to Elsie Rempel at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.