



**Mennonite
World Conference**

A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**

Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**

Une Communauté
d'Eglises Anabaptistes

Worship Resource

Peace Sunday 2012

A Resource to celebrate God's desired Peace
Mennonite World Conference Peace Commission¹

Texts and Quotes

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:14-18).

The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all aspects of life, so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and we share our possessions with the needy.²

Peace is God's desire for humanity, because God himself is a God of Peace and Jesus Christ is Lord of peace (Eph. 2.14,17). His Spirit is the Spirit of peace, his kingdom is the reign of peace (Rom 14.17), his gospel is the good news of peace (Eph 6.15), their children are peacemakers (Mt 5.9).³

Background

Since the 1980s, member states have been introduced in the United Nations (UN) to the importance of highlighting the issue of peace to overcome the various forms of conflict and violence in the world. In 2001 General Assembly, the UN issued a resolution establishing the September 21 of each year as International Peace Day, urging all countries to develop activities of celebration and observance of peace, visible initiatives, educate and strengthen the ideals of peace and the need for creative actions to achieve the easing of tensions and causes of conflict.

Commemorating this date also offers the opportunity everywhere that there be a cessation of violence and hostilities and to encourage nonviolent endings to conflicts around the world.

By 2012, the UN included the sustainability of peace urging people to care for the environment as an essential element in achieving world peace.⁴

Challenge for the people: A challenge for the body of Christ

For the body of Christ the celebration of peace is not an action of one day, but is a key way for every person and church to align with God's purposes. September 21 each year is the opportunity to renew our contributions to peace in the manner of Jesus.

We remember that God does not give us peace for only a day. God longs for a permanent comprehensive peace that embraces the individual, family, community, nation, world and creation – a peace that embraces all social, political, economic, and spiritual aspects of our lives.

That peace offered by the Lord is the fruit of justice (Is 32.17; James 3.18). The Lord says: *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard”* (Isaiah 58:6-8).

Living in peace with justice will be a proclamation to the nations: *“Then your light will shine like the dawn and your wounds will heal very soon”* (Is 58.6-8).

Peace is present when love and obedience to God are manifestations of solidarity and restoring the dignity of those who suffer poverty and discrimination.

As churches we are urged to be vigilant of that peace which God desires. It is therefore necessary to reject all forms of violence, from the most visible to the most hidden. We do not share initiatives, actions, and proposals that increase the armaments that destroy others and generate inequality. Peace is also violated in many ways such as domestic and urban violence, discrimination, gender violence, the violence generated by the imposition of economic mega-projects that affect people and creation.

As churches we are called to permanent actions for peace. Churches are places where we unlearn violence and learn new and inclusive practices that respect the dignity of people. Churches can have a great broad range of actions, from educational initiatives to those that help to curb violence, bringing opponents together to promote dialogue and restoration.

As Mennonites we are called to keep alive the belief inspired by the faith of our forebears, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. They gave an example of radical discipleship to Jesus Christ and in the midst of adversity and persecution, were faithful to the word of God and the Holy Spirit's guidance and proclaimed the good news of the gospel of peace. So we too are called to be peacemakers.

An Experience

In Colombia, the Mennonite Church in collaboration with local organizations and churches has been celebrating the International Day of Peace for about 8 years. We advocate for nonviolence and cease-fire with the slogan "Bread and Peace."

The main purpose is for churches to exercise a prophetic role, to report different forms of violence, and announce the good news of the gospel of peace. Our call is to a comprehensive understanding of peace. The exercise of nonviolence and peace belong together, for the dignity of all human beings – which includes food and optimal living conditions. A peace inspired by God's purpose is for us to live abundantly.

As part of the celebration we do public actions that include songs, liturgies and encourage people to share the bread. We also encourage each person and each church to make commitments to peace that can be evaluated annually. These commitments are:

1. I vow to cultivate a personal and familial spirituality of love and nonviolence
2. I pledge to respect and protect the dignity of human life in all its forms and the care of creation.
3. I pledge to practice nonviolence in all my family relationships rejecting physical, verbal, and psychological abuse.
4. I pledge, in love to my neighbour, to resolve conflicts non-violently.
5. I pledge to build solidarity and work for an alternative economy that promotes human, integrated, and sustainable development.
6. I pledge to not bear arms or participate in military initiatives.
7. I pledge to put my gifts, talents, skills, time and resources to the service of building, through active nonviolence, a society for life, justice and peace.

After many years, this celebration now includes not only the Mennonites. It is a celebration adopted by churches of different denominations. Each September 21 is the date in which we demonstrate samples of its annual peace initiatives that we have engaged, including education activities, concerts, social mobilization, dialogue and consultation with governments to make visible the need for peace in local, regional and national settings. We encourage all churches to take this commitment seriously in their life and practice.

Litany for Peace

Reader: Our good God, God the giver of life, Maker of heaven and the earth and everything around us.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We give you this troubled world, full of injustice, inequality and violence.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We pray for forgiveness because this world is far from understanding your promise of love and dignity for your people.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We long for your presence among us to understand and live your peace. Guide us in the way of peace. Make us peacemakers. May your Holy Spirit guide us to be witnesses to your truth.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: Have mercy on victims of violence, inequities and cruel wars. Heal their wounds and restore their dignity.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We pray for the rulers and the powerful to work righteousness and be good stewards of public resources.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We pray for everyone in the world. Transform our hearts from hatred, practices of violence and injustice and allow us to understand your infinite love.

All: Lord, we pray for your peace

Reader: We give to you our cities, our countries and the world, because we long for your peace.

**All: Lord, we pray for your peace
Amen**

Suggested Actions

Witnessing for peace as the body of Christ

- Take the Sunday service closest to September 21 to commemorate the International Day of Peace. Prepare sermons, songs and prayers alluding to peace.
- Promote meetings within your faith community and inter-church venues to reflect on peace and justice issues, overcoming violence, gender justice, environmental and human dignity.
- In Sunday schools encourage each person to take a commitment to personal, family, community and national peace, in such a way that this commitment can be assessed in a timely fashion.
- Pray for peace in public venues – where it is allowed.
- Distribute pamphlets and brochures that encourage peace.
- Write letters urging government leaders to focus on the peace that God wants for his people.

Church announcing the Good News to the community

- Organize or participate in meetings attended by representatives of community action boards, NGOs, private and state colleges, private institutions, municipalities and media. Tell them about the UN resolution on the day of peace and invite them to join you in a declaration/public action for peace.
- Take advantage of these venues to share experiences as a peace church and the meaning of nonviolence and cease fire, and the importance of these issues for their community.
- Encourage and make a public, joint celebration of peace.

The church's prophetic witness to peace

- Focus on September 21: one day declared as international and intergovernmental date for peace by the United Nations.
- Send letters to local and national governments calling for a day of truce and a better distribution of public revenues.
- Meet or maintain contact with members of governments who have been willing to support the initiative of the churches.

¹ Prepared by Jenny Neme. Member of the Mennonite Church of Colombia. Justapaz Director. Member of the Peace Commission of Mennonite World Conference.

² Mennonite World Conference Shared Convictions were adopted at the General Council of Mennonite World Conference held in Pasadena, California on March 15, 2006.

³ Summit of Colombian Churches for Peace Minutes: "Towards a biblical foundation for peace," San Andres Island / Colombia. 2006.

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/events/peaceday/>