



# There is a River Whose Streams Make Glad the City of God

Worship Resources for Mennonite Heritage Sunday, October 29, 2000

Scriptures: Psalm 46, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

## Introduction

October 29 is designated as Mennonite Heritage Sunday in Canada and the U.S. We invite your use of these resources, based on the *Revised Common Lectionary* readings, in whole or in part. It is a time to celebrate God's grace that gathers people from all cultures and language groups to share a common heritage, like many streams flowing into one river. Psalm 46:4 suggests the theme: *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.*

If you have other themes in place for October 29, consider designating another Sunday to focus on faith and heritage. January 21, Mennonite World Fellowship Sunday, would be an appropriate date, since on that day in 1525 the first adult baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland. The following week was a time of intense evangelistic activity by the Anabaptists who sparked the Free Church Movement.

(October 29 is also the day that Mennonite Church USA is asking for a special offering to help pay the expenses of the transformation process.)

## Musical Call to worship, *The River is Here*

Ask your youth group, who may have learned this song at St. Louis 99, to sing this lively tune as a call to worship. The song by Andy Park is found in *Celebration Singers*, published by Mercy/Vineyard Publishers, 1994. It is also printed in the St. Louis 99 songbook.

An alternate musical call to worship is the more familiar *Shall we gather at the river.*

## Visual and Movement Symbols

Ask four people dressed in black to create the impression of a river for the congregation. The four people should hold the four corners of a bright blue piece of cloth six feet wide by twelve feet long. The dancers should come from the back of the congregation during the singing of *The River is Here*. By working together the four people can make the blue cloth ripple from one end to the other and appear to represent a flowing river. It is important

that the dancers work together so that the ripples in the cloth are slow and majestic. While doing the ripple affect the four people should move slowly down to the front of the church and with a flourish lay the cloth across the front of the platform and steps. For the rest of the worship service the blue cloth can be a symbolic river to which other worship leaders may refer.

**Spoken call to worship/welcome** (based on Psalm 46)

L: Come, people of God,  
let us worship the One who is our refuge and strength,  
who is an ever present help in times of distress.

P: We come in the company of our spiritual fore-fathers and mothers,  
who joined the company of God's people at great risk.

L: There is a river whose streams give joy to the city of God,  
the holy dwelling of the Most High.

P: We come in the company of new streams of God's people,  
flowing into the community of faith, giving joy to the city of God.

L: God is in its midst; it stands firm.  
God will aid it at break of day.

P: We come to see the works of the Lord;  
the marvelous things God has done on earth;  
all over the world, God makes wars to cease,  
breaking bows, splintering spears, burning the shields with fire.

All: "Be still and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted upon the earth."

**Hymns from *Hymnal: A Worship Book***

*366 God of grace and God of glory*  
*301 Joys are flowing like a river*  
*372 O healing river*  
*407 People of God's peace*

**Confession** (based on John 8: 31-36)

L: Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

P: Come, healing river.

L: We have said, "Abraham is our father, Menno is our father. How is it that we are in bondage?  
From what shall we be set free?"

P: Come healing river.

L: We confess that we have been slaves to sin, alienated from you and from each other.

We have failed to live in the unity of the Spirit.

P: Come, healing river.

L: Set us free from bondage to sin; let us live forever as sons and daughters in your house; may your word find a place within us and flourish. We long to be free indeed.

P: Come, healing river.

**Offering** (for the transformation process)

**Offertory**

*The River is Here* Instrumental ensemble or solo

**Children's Story**

The theme for Heritage Sunday can be made more concrete for younger children by using a few simple visual aids.

1. Take a piece of poster board and draw a picture of the Mississippi River on it, also showing some of the tributaries which flow into it—Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, etc. The map doesn't have to be geographically perfect, just so the children get a sense of the Mississippi being a *big* river that is fed by the water, energy and life of other *smaller* rivers.

You could then draw an analogy to the many different kinds of people who have contributed to the Mennonite Church "river" over the centuries: "For a long time, children, the Mennonite river of God's people flowed mainly from countries like Switzerland, and Germany, and Russia, and the United States. But now the river of God is bringing us brothers and sisters from places like India, and Asia, and Africa, and Latin America!"

Another idea to make this visual idea work is to get a world globe and locate the United States or Canada on it. Or better yet, have one of the kids do it, and then show how the flow of God's people came here from Switzerland, Germany, Russia, etc. You can trace lines across the globe from those countries to the U.S or Canada, like you are following the path of various rivers. Then when you talk about the new rivers of people that God is bringing to us, you can trace your fingers from India, Asia, Africa and Latin America. (By the way, kids love maps; if you have older children they would love to point out the countries and regions.)

2. If you want to take the idea of God's new river a step further, you can tell the following story of Thinigar and Petty Zither (Thin-uh-gahr and Peh-tee Zith-err) from India.

Both Thinigar and Petty grew up in southern India, and were raised in the Anglican Church tradition. Before they left India for the United States to go to college, they became Methodist Christians. It was a hard decision to leave India and the life they had made for themselves there. Thinigar had worked for the Indian government 25 years, and Petty had taught school for 10 years. But they felt that God was calling to train for ministry. One of Petty's brothers met a Mennonite girl from Goshen, Indiana, and married her. This was the first time Thinigar and Petty had ever heard of Mennonites! In 1993 they decided to go to a Mennonite school—Hesston College—to study in the pastoral ministry program. "Those two years at Hesston helped us to understand Mennonites, and to embrace the Mennonite Church as our own," said Thinigar.

After they graduated from Hesston College, Petty and Thinigar followed a call to pastor a Native American congregation in Hammon, Oklahoma. After three years they heard God call them to plant a new church. Allegheny Mennonite Conference in western Pennsylvania asked them to start an Asian-Indian church in Pittsburgh. They held their first public worship service of the Asian-Indian Christian church last year, on December 12, 1999. And that's where they are today—in Pittsburgh—sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Because of people like Thinigar and Petty Zither the river of God keeps getting bigger and bigger.

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*These resources were created by Sandy Miller, Marilyn Voran, Richard Wineland, Joe Miller and John E. Sharp, of the Yellow Creek, East Goshen, and Waterford congregations, Goshen, Ind, for the Historical Committee & Archives of the Mennonite Church, 1700 South Main, Goshen, IN 46526; 219 535-7477.*