

JOURNEY
FORWARD

PATHWAYS

STUDY GUIDE

JOURNEY
FORWARD



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There's still more to the "Pathways" study guide! Visit mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/ to find:

- A final capstone session
- The feedback survey

Introduction: “Pathways” Study Guide

Purpose of Journey Forward, “Renewed Commitments” and accompanying Study Guide

Journey Forward is Mennonite Church USA’s churchwide renewal process of engaging in Scripture, storytelling and sharing how God is at work in the lives of people and congregations across MC USA. Its purpose is for us to renew our local and denomination-wide identity and affirm our core beliefs as we live out the mission to which God calls us as the church. It is a process, not a conclusion. The process invites you to connect how you’re living God’s call to broader church mission and draws our attention to how the Living Word is moving in our midst.

Propelled by the energy and outcomes of the 2017 Future Church Summit (FCS), the “Renewed Commitments” document (see Appendix A) concisely names core values orienting MC USA toward a faithful future. These are organized into four theological themes. The accompanying “Pathways” study guide is a resource for congregations, conferences, agencies and constituency groups to use in exploring how they might live out these values in their particular contexts.

Overview of “Renewed Commitments”

God invites us to experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation. We yearn to know and share in the mystery of God’s unending love. But we live in a broken world. The Holy Spirit beckons us toward the restoration of all things in Christ, and on this journey together, we commit to:

- Follow Jesus,
- Witness to God’s peace, and
- Experience transformation.

The full text of the “Renewed Commitments” document is included in the study guide Appendix A.

While Journey Forward is not about the document, “Renewed Commitments” provides a springboard for Bible study, wrestling with identity and storytelling about how congregations live these values out in different ways and in different places. It will not create a new Confession of Faith, and doesn’t replace any foundational documents. It’s about how your experience connects with the whole.



“Pathways” Study Guide

This study guide is structured around the four “Renewed Commitments” themes, and each theme includes three study sessions:

Theme 1: Identity and Context Session 1.1: Belovedness and Confession Session 1.2: Sin, Truth-telling, Repentance Session 1.3: Restoration and Commitment
Theme 2: Follow Jesus Session 2.1: Radical Christian Discipleship Session 2.2: Anabaptist Understandings of Scripture Session 2.3: Baptism in the Believers’ Church
Theme 3: Witness to God’s Peace Session 3.1: Living as Witnesses Session 3.2: God’s Gift of Peace Session 3.3: Christ’s Redemption of the World
Theme 4: Experience Transformation Session 4.1: Living and Worshiping Together Session 4.2: The Power of the Holy Spirit Session 4.3: Revealing God’s Beauty

In order to provide an opportunity for users to review their key discussion threads and learnings, the study guide includes a final 13th session as a capstone which you can find at <http://mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/>.

Each study session shares a common structure: (a) gather; (b) encounter through Scripture and stories; (c) discern through personal reflection, sharing and discussion; (4) embody through integration and applications in local context; (5) send.

In addition to the full text of the “Renewed Commitments” document, the study guide appendix includes links to other resource materials. Examples are the Journey Forward website, sermon starters and worship resources that align with study guide sessions, Future Church Summit materials and other resources.

◀ How to use the “Pathways” Study Guide

Each study guide session is designed for about an hour in length. Leaders and groups will decide ahead of time whether to cover the study guide material in four weeks, or up to 13 weeks. For four weeks, use the first session in each theme, identified in bold type above (e.g. 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1). For 13 weeks, use all themes, one each week. Use the 13th session as a capstone.

To prepare in advance, the leader will confirm the meeting location and time with participants. The leader will also read through the study guide material and prepare the resource items needed. The study sessions intentionally include enough material that discussion leaders have flexibility to select the exercises, Scripture references and questions that are most relevant to their particular discussion group for each theme and session. In addition, the leader will designate one person to listen for and record key discussion threads and learnings. This written record will help groups recall key points and will enable sharing feedback across the denomination.

This guide is adaptable for different sizes and types of groups. Some sessions suggest seating arrangements, such as groups of 6 to 8 people seated around tables or using chairs to form a circle, and you can adapt the format as necessary for your group. It is recommended to begin each section by introducing yourself as the leader and offering a brief summary of the purpose relating to that session’s “Renewed Commitments” theme. For example, “We’re here to reflect together on our shared journey as part of Mennonite Church USA and to renew our shared commitments as we follow in the path of Jesus.”

How to Share Feedback

Your feedback is important! Journey Forward is an invitation to share your story. We will build our denominational story from your story. An online survey will be available at mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward in order for groups to provide feedback on key discussion threads and learnings. Feedback and stories from all groups will be gathered and consolidated for sharing themes across the denomination. This type of engagement aims to shift how we relate as a denomination, towards storytelling, equipping and connecting, which will inform the focus of the MC USA delegate assembly at MennoCon19. Although the process is the focus, your feedback will also be used to update the “Renewed Commitments” document in 2019. It is anticipated that congregations and other groups will have the opportunity to share their stories interactively at MennoCon19 as we continue to understand and express our local and denomination-wide identities.

About the Writing Team

The Journey Forward writing team, with support from many others, prepared the “Renewed Commitments” document and the “Pathways” study guide. The team includes the following members:

- Sarah Ann Bixler, Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
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- Natalie Francisco, Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Virginia
- Janie Beck Kreider (MC USA staff liaison), Charlottesville, Virginia
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Their diversity in writing styles and backgrounds throughout this study guide is intentional and reflects the beauty of diversity across our denomination.

Theme 1: Identity & Context

Session 1.1: Belovedness and Confession



Session Summary

We begin our journey forward by affirming a fundamental truth: God loves us. Confessing the truth of our own belovedness allows us to honestly confess ways we fail to experience and extend God's love.

Session Objectives

- To collectively affirm our belovedness as God's creation, allowing the Holy Spirit to root and ground us in love
- To begin to examine ways in which our experiences do not align with God's desires for us (sin/brokenness)

Materials

Prior to the session, gather:

- A copy of "Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward" (Appendix A)
- A copy of this study guide
- A Bible
- Printed copies of the opening prayer for each participant (found in the resource section at the end of this session)
- Printed copies of table questions
- Whiteboard/flip chart with markers
- Mirrors (approximately 1 for every 8 participants)
- Sticky notes
- Index cards
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Optional: Copies of the hymnal supplement "Sing the Journey"

Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself to the group and offer this brief summary of the purpose of the session: "We're here to reflect together on our shared journey as part of Mennonite Church USA and to renew our shared commitments as we follow in the path of Jesus."
2. This session envisions groups of 6 to 8 people seated around tables, but you can adapt the format as necessary for your space. Distribute one mirror, a set of sticky notes and several index cards on each table.
3. Invite participants to read together the "Opening Prayer" adapted from Ephesians 3:14-21 (found in the resources section at the end of this session).
4. Optional: if your group is comfortable singing together, sing either "The Love of God" (#44 in "Sing the Journey") or simply a verse of "Jesus Loves Me."



Encounter (10-15 minutes, large group conversation)

1. As you prepare to encounter God through Scripture, invite participants to take an index card and write down words or phrases that stand out as they hear the following passages.
2. Invite individuals from your group to read aloud the following Scriptures. Follow each Scripture reading with a brief moment of silent reflection.
 - a. Psalm 24:1
 - b. Genesis 1:31
 - c. Romans 3:23
 - d. John 3:16-17
 - e. Ephesians 3:18-19 (echoing the opening prayer)
3. Ask your group to call out a few words or phrases that struck them from the readings. Write these words or phrases on the board.
4. If time permits, ask your group to identify other Scripture passages that speak to God's love for creation and humanity. Write these Scripture references on the board.

Discern (10-15 minutes, table group conversation)

1. Read aloud the introduction from "Renewed Commitments":

"God invites us to experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation. We yearn to know and share in the mystery of God's unending love. We confess that sin fragments our wholeness and strains our relationships with God, each other and the world. Confronted with the misuses of power in our lives, communities and institutions, we seek to tell the truth and repent. The Holy Spirit beckons us toward the restoration of all things in Christ. God continually calls us beloved."
2. Invite table groups to engage with the following questions:
 - a. Why is God's love an appropriate starting point for renewing our shared commitments as disciples? What other starting points might we consider for this conversation?
 - b. Scripture speaks of God's love as "surpassing knowledge." How can we know something that surpasses knowledge?
 - c. Do we feel any tension between "affirming our belovedness" and "not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought" (Romans 12)? How do we live faithfully within that tension?



Embody (20-25 minutes, table group reflections)

1. Invite participants to pass around the mirror at their table, taking time to look at their own reflection and affirm God's love for them. They could state their name and say, "I am loved by God."
2. Invite participants to write a word, phrase, or sentence on a sticky note that reminds them of how God loves them. This could be a Scripture verse, popular quote or something a loved one has told them. Have them attach these notes to their table's mirror.
3. Invite participants to reflect together on the following questions:
 - a. How has the Mennonite church been known by our love for one another?
 - b. How has the Mennonite church not been known for its love for one another? What do we need to confess?
 - c. Would those outside our congregation, conference, agency or constituency group "know that we are Jesus' disciples by our love for one another" (John 13:35)? Why or why not?
 - d. How might our congregation (or conference, agency or constituency group) better affirm God's love for us? For all creation?
4. Invite each table group to share two or three highlights from their conversation with the large group.

Send (3-5 minutes, large group)

1. As table groups conclude their conversation, invite them to consider the following:
 - a. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to **moments when you experience God's love.**
 - b. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to **barriers that hinder your experience of God's love.**
 - c. Keep a running list this week, and come prepared to share a few thoughts next time your group gathers.
2. Read aloud this quote from Menno Simons: "Lord of hosts! When I swim in the merciful waters of your grace I find that I can neither plumb nor measure the depths."
3. Offer a prayer of blessing for your group. Pray in your own words, or offer this prayer: "Most gracious and merciful God, may we find ourselves filled to the full with the knowledge of your love this week. In the name of Christ, Amen."



Resources for Session 1.1

Opening Prayer

Leader: For this reason we bow our knees before our Maker,

All: from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

L: We pray that, according to the riches of God's glory,

A: God may grant that we may be strengthened in our inner beings with power through the Spirit,

L: and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith,

A: as we are being rooted and grounded in love.

L: We pray that we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints,

A: what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

L: and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

A: so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

L: Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,

A: to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Session 1.2: Sin, Truth-Telling and Repentance



Session Summary

Even as we affirm God's love for us, we recognize the brokenness of our world — and of ourselves. The wholeness God desires for creation has been fractured by sin, both personal and systemic. Christ's beloved church is not immune from sin. Our desire to seek peace and pursue it requires an ongoing, honest reckoning with sin.

Session Objectives

- To grapple together with our understanding of sin
- To name specific sins, both personal and systemic, that impact our lives, our churches and our communities
- To celebrate the forgiveness of sins promised by God through Christ

Materials

Prior to the session, gather:

- A copy of “Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward” (Appendix A)
- A copy of this study guide
- A Bible
- Printed copies of the closing prayer for each participant (found in the resource section at the end of this session)
- Printed copies of table questions
- Whiteboard/flip chart with markers
- Index cards
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Copies of “Hymnal: A Worship Book” (or printouts of the lyrics to “Come, thou Fount”)
- Optional: A/V equipment to display materials

Note: Since this subject can become personally sensitive, the “Embody” section offers two options: structured dialogue around tables, or pre-planned storytelling. If you opt to utilize storytelling, meet with your storytellers beforehand and shape an outline of what they will share.

Even as we affirm God's love for us, we recognize the brokenness of our world — and of ourselves. The wholeness God desires for creation has been fractured by sin, both personal and systemic. Christ's beloved church is not immune from sin. Our desire to seek peace and pursue it requires an ongoing, honest reckoning with sin.



Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself to the group and offer this brief summary of the purpose of the session: “We’re here to reflect together on our shared journey as part of Mennonite Church USA and to renew our shared commitments as we follow in the path of Jesus.”
2. This session envisions groups of 6 to 8 people seated around tables with several index cards on each table, but you can adapt the format as necessary for your space.
3. If any participants engaged in the last session’s sending activity, invite them to share some of their experiences:
 - a. Were there **moments when you experienced God’s love? When?**
 - b. When did you encounter **barriers that hindered your experience of God’s love?**
4. After a few people have shared, transition into this week’s session: “Sin, Truth-Telling and Repentance”
5. Invite participants to read together the Lord’s Prayer, using the phrases “sins” and “those who sin against us” (found in the resource section at the end of this session).
6. Sing together “Come, thou fount” (#521 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”).

Encounter (10-15 minutes, whole group conversation & Bible study)

1. As you transition from “Gathering” to “Encountering,” invite someone to write the third verse of “Come, thou fount” on the whiteboard:

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wand’ring heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.”
2. Read from Article 7 of the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective” (1995):

“Sin is turning away from God and making gods of creation and of ourselves. We sin by making individual and group choices to do unrighteousness and injustice. We sin by omitting to do good and neglecting to give God the glory due our Creator and Redeemer. In sinning, we become unfaithful to the covenant with God and with God’s people, destroy right relationships, use power selfishly, do violence, and become separated from God. As a result, we are not able to worship God rightly.”
3. As you prepare to encounter God through Scripture, invite participants to take an index card and write down words or phrases relating to sin that stand out as they hear the following passages.
4. Invite two individuals to read aloud the following Scriptures. Follow each Scripture reading with a brief moment of silent reflection.
 - a. Luke 18:9-14
 - b. Luke 18:15-17
5. Ask participants to call out a few words or phrases that struck them from the readings. Write these words or phrases on the board.



Discern (15-20 minutes, table group conversation)

1. Read aloud the introduction from “Renewed Commitments”:
“God invites us to experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation. We yearn to know and share in the mystery of God’s unending love. We confess that sin fragments our wholeness and strains our relationships with God, each other and the world. Confronted with the misuses of power in our lives, communities and institutions, we seek to tell the truth and repent. The Holy Spirit beckons us toward the restoration of all things in Christ. God continually calls us beloved.”
2. Invite table groups to engage with the following questions:
 - a. Which character in Jesus’ Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector do you identify with more? Why?
 - b. Which character seems more emblematic of the Mennonite church? Why?
 - c. Jesus offers a stern warning to those who would hinder little children from coming to him. When might our church (either our local congregation or the Mennonite church as a whole) have hindered people seeking Jesus?
 - d. How does the definition of sin in the “Confession of Faith” align with your own working definition? How does it differ?
3. As time permits, invite table groups to share with the larger group.

Embody (15-20 minutes, table group reflections or pre-planned storytelling)

Option A - Table Dialogue

1. After participants have spent time reflecting on Scripture, invite them to shift their focus to your local congregation, conference, agency or constituent group.
2. Invite participants to reflect together on the following questions:
 - a. How has our congregation, conference, agency or constituent group responded to personal sin? (Some examples may include shunning or excommunication, public confession, pastoral counseling, turning a blind eye, etc.)
 - b. How has our congregation, conference, agency or constituent group responded to systemic sin? (Some examples may include peace activism/ protest in response to violence or war, participation in Black Lives Matter, anti-racism work, a food pantry to respond to economic injustice, environmental stewardship / creation care, etc.)

Option B - Storytelling

1. Although we don’t always name it as such, much of the ministry of the church responds to human brokenness or sin. Prior to the session, identify one or two individuals who have stories of confronting sin (either personal or systemic) as an act of faithfulness. Ideas may include conscientious objectors, peace activists, public policy engagement, voluntary service, overseas or domestic service or missions experiences, reporting sexual misconduct, etc.)
2. If your storyteller is comfortable sharing more broadly, submit a summary of their story to MC USA’s Journey Forward team at <http://mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/>



Send (3-5 minutes, large group)

1. As you conclude the “Embody” exercise, invite your group to consider the following:
 - a. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to **moments when sin (personal or systemic) strains your relationships with God, each other and the world.**
 - b. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to **moments you feel prone to wander from God.**
 - c. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to moments **God’s goodness binds your wandering heart back to Christ.** Write your own prayer of confession in the coming week that addresses personal and systemic sin.
 - d. Keep a running list this week, and come prepared to share a few thoughts next time your group gathers.
2. Conclude by praying together the closing prayer of confession found in the resources for session 1.2.

Resources for Session 1.2

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen

Closing Prayer

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

From the “Book of Common Prayer” of the Anglican Church

Session 1.3: Restoration and Commitment



Session Summary

The Anabaptist story is filled with examples of costly commitment. As part of Mennonite Church USA, we seek to follow in our spiritual ancestors' footsteps, choosing faithful discipleship even at great cost.

Session Objectives

- To be challenged and inspired by Biblical stories of commitment
- To share contemporary stories of costly discipleship
- To celebrate God's power to restore and equip us in the journey of faithfulness

Materials

Prior to the session, gather:

- A copy of "Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward" (Appendix A)
- A copy of this study guide
- A Bible
- Printed copies of the closing prayer and sheets of paper for each table with each of Menno Simons' 17 commitments of "true evangelical faith" (found in the resource section at the end of this session)
- Copies of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" (or printouts of the lyrics to "You are salt for the earth")
- Whiteboard/flip chart with markers
- Index cards
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Optional: A/V equipment to display materials

Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself to the group and offer this brief summary of the purpose of the session: "We're here to reflect together on our shared journey as part of Mennonite Church USA and to renew our shared commitments as we follow in the path of Jesus."
2. This session envisions groups of 6 to 8 people seated around tables with several index cards on each table, but you can adapt the format as necessary for your space.
3. If any participants engaged in the last session's sending activity, invite them to share some of their experiences:
 - a. When did you recognize sin **(personal or systemic) straining their relationships with God, each other and the world?**
 - b. When did you **feel prone to wander from God?**
 - c. When did **God's goodness bind your wandering heart back to Christ?**
4. After a few people have shared, transition into this week's session: "Restoration and Commitment."
5. Write this quote from Menno Simons on the board and read it aloud:
 - a. "True evangelical faith is of such a nature it cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love..."



6. Invite your table groups to read, one by one, the 17 hallmarks Menno Simons identified (found in resources at the end of this session). For example, if you have four tables, three tables will have four phrases to read and one will have five. After all 17 have been named, read aloud the end of the quote: “The persecution, suffering and anguish that come to it for the sake of the Lord’s truth have become a glorious joy and comfort to it.”
7. Sing together “You are salt for the earth” (#226 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”).

Encounter (10-15 minutes, large group conversation & Bible study)

1. As you prepare to encounter God through Scripture, invite participants to take an index card and write down words or phrases related to commitment that stand out as they hear the following passages.
2. Invite an individual to read aloud the following Scripture. Follow the reading with a brief moment of silent reflection:
 - a. Luke 18:18-30
3. Ask participants to call out a few words or phrases that struck them from the readings. Write these words or phrases on the board.

Discern (10-15 minutes, table group conversation)

1. Invite table groups to engage with the following questions:
 - a. Which character in this Biblical story do you most identify with? The ruler? The disciples? Jesus? An unnamed character in the crowd? Why?
 - b. What does it mean that those who have sacrificed to follow Jesus will “receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life”?
 - c. In Mark’s telling of this story, Jesus looked at the ruler and loved him. How do we affirm Christ’s love for us even when we lack some aspects of faithfulness?
 - d. What might Jesus be inviting us to leave behind so that we may follow him more faithfully? Or, what word of encouragement might Jesus offer us if we have left much to follow him?

The Anabaptist story is filled with examples of costly commitment. As part of Mennonite Church USA, we seek to follow in our spiritual ancestors’ footsteps, choosing faithful discipleship even at great cost.



Embody (20-25 minutes, table group reflections and large group conversation)

Option A - Table Dialogue

1. After participants have spent time reflecting on Scripture, invite them to shift their focus to your local congregation, conference, agency or constituent group. Read this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a [person] must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a [person their] life, and it is grace because it gives a [person] the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: ‘ye were bought at a price,’ and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”
2. Invite participants to reflect together on the following questions:
 - a. What stories of “costly grace” or “costly discipleship” do we carry from our history?
 - b. What contemporary examples of “costly grace” or “costly discipleship” can we identify?
3. Invite table groups to share examples they identified with the larger group.
4. Introduce the three renewed commitments of the Journey Forward process:
 - a. Follow Jesus
 - b. Witness to God’s Peace
 - c. Experience Transformation
5. While the coming sessions will explore each of these in detail, invite participants to briefly consider how these commitments might be costly. Write them on the board.
6. Ask, “How might sharing these commitments as an entire church inspire us to greater faithfulness?”

Send (3-5 minutes, large group)

1. As you conclude the “Embody” exercise, invite your group to consider the following:
 - a. Throughout the coming week, be attentive to opportunities for your faith to “spread itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love.”
2. Conclude by praying together the closing peace prayer of St. Francis found in the resource section at the end of this session.



Resources for Session 1.3

The 17 commitments of “true evangelical faith” Menno Simons identified:

1. it dies to flesh and blood
2. it destroys all lusts and forbidden desires
3. it seeks, serves and fears God in its inmost soul
4. it clothes the naked
5. it feeds the hungry
6. it comforts the sorrowful
7. it shelters the destitute
8. it aids and consoles the sad
9. it does good to those who do it harm
10. it serves those that harm it
11. it prays for those who persecute it
12. it teaches, admonishes and judges us with the Word of the Lord
13. it seeks those who are lost
14. it binds up what is wounded
15. it heals the sick
16. it saves what is sound
17. it becomes all things to all people

Closing Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

From St. Francis of Assisi

Theme 2: Follow Jesus

Session 2.1: Radical Christian Discipleship



Session Summary

Drawing on symbols in the Gospels, this session identifies multiple aspects of Christian discipleship and guides participants in creating their own working definition. Participants will consider how they can be radical disciples of Jesus in their time and place.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Whiteboard or flip chart, with markers
- Symbols of discipleship: cross, sandals, fish, towel, water and Bible (pictures and/or actual objects)
- Sticky notes, at least five per participant
- Pens or pencils, one per participant
- Print and cut apart the following list:

A man born blind	Matthew, the tax collector
Ananias, of Damascus	Matthias
Andrew, of Bethsaida	Nathanael
Bartholomew	Paul, of Tarsus
Eunice, daughter of Lois	Philip, of Bethsaida
James, son of Alphaeus	Salome
James, son of Zebedee	Simon Peter, of Bethsaida
Joanna, wife of Herod's steward	Simon, the Zealot
John, son of Zebedee	Stephen
Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea	Susanna
Lydia, of Thyatira	Tabitha, of Joppa
Mary, mother of James	Thomas
Mary, mother of Jesus	Thaddeus or Judas, son of James
Mary, of Magdala	Timothy, son of Eunice



Gather (3-5 min.)

Write this unit's theme from "Renewed Commitments" on a whiteboard or flip chart:

"We commit to Follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost."

Arrange the symbols of discipleship on a table or in the middle on the floor, depending on your meeting set-up, in view of all participants.

Determine whether your group is familiar enough with the New Testament to recognize many of the names on the list of disciples. If so, place a slip of paper with a disciple's name on each chair. If not, skip the "a disciple of Jesus" activity. Depending on the size of your group, some chairs may have no papers or some may have more than one.

Invite those with a disciple's name on their chair to read the name followed by the phrase, "a disciple of Jesus." Alternatively, invite people to name Christian disciples from their own experiences, history or Scripture who they esteem, followed by the phrase, "a disciple of Jesus."

Explain that the legacy of discipleship lives on in us, spanning almost 2,000 years since these first disciples committed their lives to following Jesus. Note that this list is not exhaustive of all the disciples in the New Testament. Yet, these 28 names represent an immense variety of identities — imperfect people whose lives were transformed by their response to Jesus' call.

Offer a prayer of thanks for the disciples named and for each person present today. Invite God's Spirit to guide your group toward a fuller understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

Tell the group that today's session focuses on the first of three "Renewed Commitments" for Mennonite Church USA: following Jesus. Direct the group's attention toward the theme you have written on the board and invite everyone to read it aloud together:

"We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost."

As Mennonites, part of the Anabaptist tradition, we recognize the radical nature of discipleship as expressed in Mark 8:34: "[Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'"



Encounter (10-15 min.)

Point out the symbols you have collected that are related to discipleship. Ask participants to reflect silently on which symbol connects most with their understanding of discipleship and have a minute for silent reflection.

Designate an area of the room for each symbol. Invite participants to move to their preferred symbol. Allow five minutes for people to share, in the small groups around symbols, about why the symbol connected with them. If a symbol attracts only one person, add that symbol to another smaller group. If your total group is not big enough to form small symbol groups, invite people to share in the large group or in pairs throughout the remainder of this session.

Outline today's session by explaining that the group will be invited to sketch an overall picture of discipleship and explore what it means in their context. On the board, write the following aspects of discipleship that can be seen in the gospels:

- 1) **response** of faith to Jesus' call
- 2) loving **participation** in a community of disciples
- 3) **obedience and proclamation** that God uses to transform society

Ask participants to test these themes in the Scripture passages they will be reading and to think of other themes to add (whether from these passages or others that come to mind).

Assign the following passages to small groups, pairs or individuals, so that everyone has a passage to read and all passages are covered:

Fish: Matthew 4:18-22 Water: Matthew 28:16-20 Sandals: Mark 6:6b-9
Cross: Luke 14:25-33 Bible: John 8:31-32 Towel: John 13:12-16, 34-35

Ask groups to read their passage aloud together, or have individuals read them silently. While they are reading, give each group a pad of sticky notes.

Discern (10-15 min.)

Using the sticky notes, ask groups to write down themes from their Scripture passage that describe discipleship. When groups are finished, they should add their sticky notes to the board where you have already written three aspects of discipleship.

Lead the group in reading and discussing the posted themes. Do other aspects of discipleship come to mind that are not posted? Are there other creative metaphors for discipleship? If so, encourage the group to add more ideas and write these on the board. Other metaphors could include a sword and plow, joined hands representing different races, breaking chains, a marriage covenant and sharing of wealth.

Send participants back to their small groups to create a working definition of discipleship, drawing on the themes discussed in the large group. After about five minutes, ask every group member to write the group's definition of discipleship on a sticky note. This will allow each person to take their group's definition with them in the next activity.

Embody (20-25 min.)

Mix up the small groups so that each new small group contains a representative of each symbol of discipleship. Ask them to read their definitions to one another and identify areas of common emphasis.

Mention that the Anabaptist faith tradition grew out of costly, radical choices to follow Jesus. Give some context for radical discipleship in the Anabaptist tradition using the



information in the resource section for this session. Today, followers of Jesus around the world identify with the Anabaptist tradition as they seek to follow Jesus in radical living, no matter the cost. As Mennonites, part of the Anabaptist tradition, we recognize the radical nature of discipleship as expressed in Mark 8:34: “[Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

Ask, “What might it look like for us to practice radical Christian discipleship in our time and place?” Don’t take time for responses now, but return to the aspects of discipleship written on the board, including any you added based on the group’s input:

- 1) **response** of faith to Jesus’ call
- 2) loving **participation** in a community of disciples
- 3) **obedience and proclamation** that God uses to transform society
- 4) other ideas

Invite small groups to discuss how they might live out these aspects of discipleship individually and as a faith community in a radical way. Clarify that this is not a time simply to affirm what they have already been doing, but to imagine how they might be called to greater faithfulness in ways that are surprising and confront the status quo. Consider contexts both within and outside your congregation, conference, agency or constituent group. Give 10-15 minutes for this important discussion.

(While the discussion is going on, gather the sticky notes from one group so you have a record of the definitions of discipleship.)

Invite each group to share one or two of their most radical examples of Christian discipleship.

Send (3-5 min.)

In closing, encourage participants to continue thinking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and to look for symbols of discipleship as they go about their daily activities. Offer a prayer of blessing over these followers of Jesus. End with the words, “May the Spirit empower each of you to live into your calling as a faithful disciple of Jesus, no matter the cost. Amen.”

If your group is comfortable singing together, lead them in singing “Som’landela - We Will Follow” (#40 in “Sing the Story”):

Som’landela, Som’landel’u Jesu
Som’landela, Yonke indawo
Som’landela, Som’landel’u Jesu
Lapho Eyakhona Somlandela

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
We will follow everywhere he goes.
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
Everywhere he goes, we will follow.



Journey Forward Feedback

Visit www.mennoniteusa.org/journeyforward and enter the definitions of discipleship from each small group. Also, enter any concrete examples of discipleship that emerged in the group that strike you as new or surprising.

Resources for Session 2.1

Radical Discipleship in the Anabaptist Tradition

Anabaptism emerged from the Radical Reformation, a spiritual renewal movement in sixteenth century Europe. While the Protestant Reformation tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church, the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation sought a renewed vision for the church distinct from both Catholic and Reformed approaches.

Much diversity existed among the various groups of religious and political dissidents known as Anabaptists. Yet, we can discern some common commitments from their varied histories: baptizing believers based on their free confession of faith in Jesus Christ, disentangling church authority from ruling princes and restoring the practices of the New Testament faith communities. They placed much weight on living out the teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. As the German Anabaptist Hans Denck (1500-1527) claimed, “No one may truly know Christ except one who follows Him in life.” Because they did not conform to any leading Christian tradition of their time, some were killed for their radical beliefs and practices.



Session 2.2: Anabaptist Understandings of Scripture

Session Summary

Building on John 1:1-18, this session explores the nature of Scripture and the living Word of God from an Anabaptist perspective. Groups will identify their specific practices as a community of faith that seeks to understand Scripture.

Materials Needed

- Small pieces of paper, one per participant
- Pens or pencils
- Basket or bowl
- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Whiteboard or flip chart, with markers

Preparation of the Space

- Write this unit's theme from "Renewed Commitments" on a whiteboard or flip chart:
"We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost."
- Write these instructions on the whiteboard or flip chart:
"Who/what is God's Word? As you enter, please write a short response to this question on a sheet of paper and place it in the basket/bowl."
- Arrange the seats in a circle. Place the papers and pens around the circle, and the basket or bowl in the center.

Gather (3-5 min.)

As people enter, invite them to write down a response to the question, "Who/what is God's Word?" using the provided paper and pens. This can be a word, phrase or short description — but they should not write their name on the paper. The completed papers should be placed in the basket or bowl. Ideally, this would not take any time from the session itself but would serve as an informal exercise as attendees gather.

Revisit the previous session by asking if anyone encountered an interesting symbol of discipleship in the time since they last gathered. Invite them to briefly name their new symbols.

Announce today's session as "Anabaptist Understandings of Scripture." Invite the group to read this unit's theme aloud together:

"We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost."

Teach the group to say this short phrase in unison: "Open our eyes, Lord." Read Psalm 119:9-18 aloud as an opening prayer, pausing after each verse for the group to repeat, "Open our eyes, Lord."



Encounter (10-15 min.)

Read the following passage from 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (NRSV):

“From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Invite participants to summarize the definition of Scripture given in this passage, one of the most direct descriptions of Scripture provided in the Bible.

Acknowledge that the Bible offers many metaphors and descriptions of God’s Word. It can be understood as the sacred writings of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament — the Scriptures of the Christian faith. God’s Word is more than the written Word of Scripture though. It can also be understood as an overall message conveyed through those Scriptures and God’s spoken words (1 Kings 17:2). It refers to the person of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:13) and to the gospel and reign of God he proclaimed (Luke 4:43).

Read John 1:1-18 aloud, then ask the group to identify the different meanings of “the Word” in this passage.

The Gospel of John introduces Jesus as the Word who became flesh. Jesus is identified as God, as the author of all things, as the true light. In verse 17, Jesus is positioned in relation to the law of Moses as a bearer of grace and truth, the one who makes God known. He fulfills the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17). Thus, Mennonites seek to interpret Scripture — the written Word — in light of God’s fullest revelation in Jesus Christ — the living Word. The entire Bible holds meaning for Mennonites, but it is interpreted through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Note that some important places where this comes through are in the times God’s people commit violence, such as in Joshua and Judges. Jesus’ teaching to not retaliate by taking an eye for an eye, but rather to love enemies (Matthew 5:38-48), and his telling Peter to not defend him but to put his sword away (John 18:10-11), signal God’s vision for nonviolent love. Even parts of Scripture that come after the Gospels do not take priority when interpreting Scripture through the life and work of Jesus. Paul’s instruction for women to keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), for example, is overshadowed by Jesus’ resurrection appearance to his female disciples and entrusting to them the first proclamation that he is risen (Matthew 28:9-10, John 20:17).

Acknowledge that as Mennonites, we regard ourselves as an Anabaptist community of the living Word. Anabaptist understandings of Scripture regard God’s Word not as a static entity preserved from an ancient time, but as living and active (Hebrews 4:12). We engage the Word through the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit.

Point out that this session’s title uses a plural word on purpose: Anabaptist Understandings of Scripture. Ask the group, “Why is ‘understandings’ an important word in relation to Scripture?”



Discern (10-15 min.)

Pass the basket or bowl around the circle, pausing so each person can draw a paper and read aloud the anonymous description of God's Word written on it.

Use this exercise to point to the nature of God's Word as living and active. In the same way, our understandings of Scripture are living and active. Anabaptists are not a uniform group. Mennonites are one segment of the broader Anabaptist tradition and varying understandings of Scripture exist among us.

Today's seating arrangement as a circle illustrates the Anabaptist commitment to reading and interpreting Scripture, the written Word, as a community of the living Word. While valuing the specialized insights of those with theological training, the Mennonite church does not designate one person or elite group to act as the theological authority for interpreting Scripture. The Holy Spirit is not limited by human training. The Spirit guides the faith community as they listen to one another and discern together the meanings of Scripture, bringing together the written Word with the living Word among them.

Note how naturally, multiple understandings of Scripture arise within the Mennonite faith community. Sometimes this causes tension and conflict among us. But it is also a strength of the Mennonite tradition, challenging us all to greater faithfulness as Jesus' disciples as we come to the circle to learn from one another's understandings of Scripture and celebrate what we hold in common. The church discerns together these shared beliefs and has sometimes recorded them as confessions of faith that, over time, are revised as the Holy Spirit inspires us to read and interpret Scripture from a variety of contexts.

Offer an example of how your congregation, conference, agency or constituent group has revised its understanding of Scripture over time. Lead the group in describing how this change came about and discuss the perceived role of the Holy Spirit in this change.

If time allows and you believe this would be constructive, broaden the discussion to identifying areas where members of your congregation, conference, agency or constituent group currently differ in their understandings of Scripture.

Embody (20-25 min.)

This section allows your group to delve more deeply into the focus statement: "As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit." Explain that you will break this down into five parts, and each person will choose one to explore:

- What does it look like for us to be an Anabaptist community?
- What difference does it make to understand the Word as living?
- How do we listen for God's call?
- How do we read Scripture together?
- What does it mean for us to be guided by the Spirit?
- [if desired] What other important aspects of Anabaptism and the Word are missing from this statement?



Organize small groups around each of these questions. If you like, add a sixth group for the identification of missing elements from the focus statement. Depending on the size of your group, you may have more than one group assigned to a question, or you may want to combine two questions within one group. Allow 10-15 minutes for the small groups to discuss the question within the specific context of your congregation, agency, affinity group or conference. Each small group should identify one or two representatives to report key ideas back to the large group.

End with the group listening to one another's reflections and offering questions and comments, two to three minutes per group.

Send (3-5 min.)

Conclude by reading aloud this statement from the "Shared Convictions" of global Anabaptists identified by Mennonite World Conference in 2006: "As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience."

End with a time of prayer, asking participants to move toward the space in the middle of the circle if they are able, gathering the group closer together. Invite anyone who wishes to spontaneously offer a prayer. Close this time of prayer after several minutes.

Session 2.3: Baptism in the Believers' Church

Session Summary

This session explores the distinctive Anabaptist commitment of believers' baptism in terms of Spirit, water and blood. Drawing on biblical passages about baptism, small groups will compose a verse for the song "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." Participants will consider their own moments of baptism and the potential consequences of baptism that go beyond the spiritual and religious realms.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Whiteboard or flip chart, with markers
- Pieces of paper, one for every three to four participants
- Pens or pencils

Preparation of the Space

- Write this unit's theme on a whiteboard or flip chart:
"We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost."

Anabaptists have traditionally understood baptism in three movements mentioned in 1 John 5:7-8: spirit, water and blood.



Gather (3-5 min.)

Gather the group by singing “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” Use these lyrics, or others that are familiar to you:

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.

Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back.

Invite the group to read aloud this unit’s theme:

“We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God’s call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus’ disciples, no matter the cost.”

Encounter (10-15 min.)

Introduce today’s session as “Baptism in the Believers’ Church.” Some Mennonite baptisms include these words: “As long as you abide in his Word, you are Christ’s disciple indeed and shall be acknowledged as a brother/sister in the church” (Minister’s Manual, Faith & Life Press, 1998). Ask if anyone present recalls these words being spoken at their baptism or a baptism they witnessed. This statement links discipleship, the Word and baptism — the three topics of this theme.

Most of today’s session will take place in small groups. Divide into small groups of three or four persons each. Invite them to share stories of their own baptism and ask each other, “What did your baptism mean to you and to your faith community?”



Anyone baptized as an infant in another tradition could share the story told to them by their parents or guardians, who had them baptized as a child of God who has already received God's grace, which differs from the Anabaptist meaning of baptism. Those who have not been baptized may choose to listen or to share a story of a baptism they have witnessed. Each person should have three to four minutes to share and respond to their group's questions.

Discern (10-15 min.)

Assign the following passages to the small groups and give each a sheet of paper and a pen. You may need to split some groups into pairs or individuals, or assign the same passage to multiple groups, so that everyone has a passage to read and all passages are covered:

Matthew 3:13-17
Acts 2:38-39

Matthew 28:16-20
Romans 6:1-4

John 4:1-3
Galatians 3:27-29

Ask each group to compose a new verse for the song "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" that captures an important idea about baptism from their Scripture passage. These will be sung at the end of the session.

Embody (20-25 min.)

Identify believer's baptism as one of the distinctive characteristics of Mennonite theology and practice. Though most of the baptisms recorded in scripture involve adults, baptizing people as conscious believers — upon their own confession of faith — was not always practiced in the Christian tradition. When the first Anabaptists baptized each other as adults and refused to baptize their newborns, who could not profess faith on their own, they defied both the religious and political authorities. They stood in radical opposition to the governing church, which alone claimed the authority to baptize and protect infants' souls in the event of premature death. The early Anabaptists also stood in active opposition to the local government, which relied on infant baptism records for census and tax purposes.

Invite the small groups to discuss how believer's baptism could be seen as something that distinguishes you from your cultural context. How might it even be an act of resistance? After 7-10 minutes of discussion, ask each small group to share one key insight with the larger group.

Explain that Anabaptists have traditionally understood baptism in three movements mentioned in 1 John 5:7-8: spirit, water and blood.

1. The first is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is the movement of God within a new believer that involves repentance and grace.
2. The second moment of baptism is the most familiar, the symbol of water baptism. Read this description from "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective":

"Baptism by water is a sign that a person has repented, received forgiveness, renounced evil, and died to sin, through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Thus cleansed, believers are incorporated into Christ's body on earth, the church. Baptism by water is also a pledge to serve Christ and to minister as a member of his body according to the gifts given to each one. ... Baptism is done in obedience to Jesus' command and as a public commitment to identify with Jesus Christ, not only in his baptism by water, but in his life in the Spirit and in his death in suffering love."



3. The third moment of baptism is baptism of blood, or the willingness to die as a witness to Jesus Christ should circumstances come to that. Jesus called his followers to take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24-25) and was straightforward with them about the suffering that could result. This is the “no matter the cost” aspect of discipleship.

Lead the large group in reflecting on these three moments of baptism.

- Which of these are emphasized most in your congregation, conference, agency or constituency group?
- How might you take more seriously those moments of baptism that are less emphasized?

Send (3-5 min.)

Lead the group in singing “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” this time using the new verses created by each small group. Pause after each verse for the next group to read their verse aloud so everyone can sing it.

Close by reading aloud the theme, one final time:

“We commit to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God’s call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus’ disciples, no matter the cost.”

May it be so. Amen.

Theme 3: Witness to God's Peace

Session 3.1: Living as Witnesses



Session Summary

We are people of God's peace, which we receive by the Holy Spirit who infuses our lives with Christ's love for the world.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Copies of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" (or printouts of the lyrics to "We are people of God's peace" and prayer #697)
- Small pieces of paper, one per participant
- Pens or pencils

Gather (3-5 minutes):

1. Invite participants to sing, "We are people of God's peace" (#407 in "Hymnal: A Worship Book")
2. Invite participants to name a word, phrase or image that comes to mind when they heard the word "peace."

Encounter (10-15 minutes):

1. Read the theme from "Renewed Commitments":
"We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms, and in all places."
2. *Ask a member of the group to read the following aloud:* Jesus Christ is the prince of peace, the one sent to us to reveal God's justice and mercy, liberation and forgiveness. Jesus is God's love made flesh, the embodiment of God's peace. His life is good news. And his death and resurrection bear witness to: 1) the threat his good news poses to the powers that be (which is why they killed him for his actions) 2) the vindication of his love for the world (which we see in the resurrection).
3. *Ask another member to read the following aloud:* We have been baptized into the life of Jesus, baptized into the power of the Holy Spirit, baptized into God's declaration that the way of peace is eternal life — love that never ends. We bear witness to Christ's peaceable love for the world with our lives as we repent of the sins that oppress others. We bear witness to Christ's peace as we let the Spirit cleanse us from the temptations to use power for our own selfish gain or treat people as objects for our use. We bear witness to God's peace whenever we stand in solidarity with people who are threatened with violence.
4. Provide five minutes for participants to write down the violences they experience or see around them in their communities, in this country and in the world. Then invite volunteers to name aloud what they wrote.



Discern (10-15 minutes):

1. Break up into three groups. Assign a different passage to each group. Have them discuss these questions in light of the Scriptures: What are the sins that get in the way of peace? What are the images associated with peacework? What language does the passage give us to help us name God's vision for peace?
 - a. Isaiah 58:1-12
 - b. Micah 6:6-8
 - c. Isaiah 9:2a-7
2. Return to the large group. Invite participants to share from their group discussion: What word, phrase, or image from these Scriptures invites you to think about God's peace in ways you haven't before?

Embody (20-25 minutes):

1. Read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. This passage is also printed in the back of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" as a responsive reading (#853).
2. *Read the following to the group:* In his New Testament epistles, the apostle Paul uses a single Greek word that gets translated into English with two different words in our Bibles, depending on the choice of the translator. In Greek, Paul writes *dikaiosyne theou* at the end of verse 21, which can either be translated as "the justice of God" or "the righteousness of God." In English, the word "justice" tends to have a different meaning than "righteousness." But according to Paul, justice is the righteousness of God — we are becoming God's justice on earth, bearing witness to God's justice for all, which is what it means to be "ambassadors of Christ" (verse 20). Spanish translations of the Bible (for example, see La Reina-Valera) stay closer to the meaning of the original Greek word by using *justicia*. The Latin Vulgate also has *iustitia dei*, the "justice of God." Ask the group, "What difference might it make whether we think of this as God's justice or God's righteousness?"
3. Return to the gathering hymn, "We are people of God's peace" (#407). These are the words of Menno Simons. Have a different person read each verse aloud. Notice how the hymn echoes with the words from 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Ask, "In what ways does the hymn echo the language in the other Scriptures we read earlier?"
4. *Ask a member of the group to read aloud the following:* The gospel has been unleashed into the world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ — a "new creation" breaking the chains of the old (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are ambassadors of this new world: "God is making his appeal through us" (verse 20).

As Menno Simons wrote in 1544, "Those who are one with Christ in Spirit, love, and life, who teach that which was commanded them by Christ, namely, repentance and the peaceable gospel of grace ... are flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bone." We have been entrusted with the gospel — to live Christ's redemption with our whole selves — our words and deeds, our testimonies and service, our preaching and protests.



5. *Invite the group to discuss the following questions:*

- a. Where have you seen God's redemption blossom in our world?
- b. Is there a stronghold of injustice in your community that is crying out for the healing work of God's peace?
- c. How might God be calling us to participate in this peace?

Send (3-5 minutes):

1. Turn to the back of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" and lead the group in praying #697.
2. Read aloud John 20:19-22 (NRSV) as a benediction:

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Session 3.2: Receiving Peace

Session Summary

God's peace is not a work we achieve; instead, it's a gift we receive. Jesus Christ is that gift – the One who we receive through the Holy Spirit. We are called to open our lives to God's redeeming peace.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Copies of “Hymnal: A Worship Book” (or printouts of the lyrics to “Will you let me be your servant” and prayer #697)
- Small pieces of paper, one per participant
- Pens or pencils

Gather (3-5 minutes):

1. Invite the group to sing “Will you let me be your servant” (#307 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”)
2. Offer a prayer inviting God to visit your gathering with the gift of the Spirit of Peace, and to open your hearts and minds to receive this gift.

Encounter (10-15 minutes):

1. *Invite the group to read aloud the theme from “Renewed Commitments”:*
“We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms and in all places.”
2. *Read aloud the following:* Peace is a gift from God, the grace of the Holy Spirit — the Spirit blowing across the waters at creation, making a world without violence before the corruption of sin (Genesis 1:2); God's breath enlivening the body of the first human being, filled with God's grace (Genesis 2:7); Jesus on his last day with his disciples, renewing their lives with the breath of the Holy Spirit's ministry of peace (John 20:21-22). Jesus is God's Word of peace made flesh, the gift of peace with each other and with God. In Christ we were offered a covenant of peace written with his body, offered to the world even though all of us were enemies of God's will (Romans 5:6-11). God offers peace from the beginning in creation. God intervenes with peace-made-flesh in Jesus. And God renews us with that same peace again and again through the Holy Spirit — the world alive with God's breath, creating life and sustaining peace.
3. Provide five minutes for participants to write down what peace looks like, what it feels like. Then invite volunteers to share aloud what they wrote.



Discern (10-15 minutes):

1. Read Ezekiel 34:25-31 — find two or three translations to read aloud. The original audience for this prophetic word was the people of God in exile, away from home, living among their oppressors. What did the promise of peace sound like for them? What kind of peace were they hoping for?
2. Read Isaiah 11:1-9 — find two or three translations to read aloud. Listen for images of peace in the passage. What does God's peace mean for the world? What does God's peace mean for our lives?

Embody (20-25 minutes):

1. *Invite a member of the group to read aloud the following:* In the passage from Ezekiel 34, God makes a “covenant of peace” (verse 25). God is the peacemaker, making a place for human beings to flourish — just as God did at the beginning of creation. The work of creation is the work of peace. The God of creation is the God of peace. That's who the Word-made-flesh is: Jesus Christ, the God of creation, renewing the covenant of peace. In Ephesians 2:14-17, Christ is the gift of peace, redeeming the world through his body. “He is our peace,” it says. “He came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”
2. *Invite another member to read aloud the following:* Since Christ is our peace — God's gift for a redeemed world — our posture is one of hospitality: what does it mean to welcome God's peace, to receive the gift of Christ? How should we live our lives so that we are open to welcoming God's peace into the world? Luke 24:28-35 tells the story of the disciples who offered Jesus hospitality without knowing it. Read the story out loud and discuss what we can learn about how to welcome Jesus into our lives.
 - a. Who are the strangers in our world who might be Jesus to us, offering the gift of peace?
 - b. Are there people or organizations in our community who show us what peace looks like?
 - c. Have we ever been tempted to act as if peace is a gift we give to the world, rather than a gift we receive from God?

Send (3-5 minutes):

1. Turn to the back of “Hymnal: A Worship Book” and lead the group in praying #697.
2. Read aloud Hebrews 13:20-21 as a benediction.

God's peace is not a work we achieve; instead, it's a gift we receive. Jesus Christ is that gift — the One who we receive through the Holy Spirit. We are called to open our lives to God's redeeming peace.

Session 3.3: Extending Peace

Session Summary

The gospel is a call of grace, where God invites us to be ambassadors of Christ's peace. We extend what God has given us: that is, the Spirit's movement of justice and love, of righteousness and peace, for the whole world.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- Copies of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" (or printouts of the lyrics to "Jesus came — the heavens adoring" and prayer #702)
- Small pieces of paper, one per participant
- Pens or pencils

Gather (3-5 minutes):

1. Invite participants to "pass the peace" by moving around the room, greeting one another with the words, "The peace of the Lord be with you," and responding, "And also with you."
2. Invite the group to sing "Jesus came — the heavens adoring" (#297 in "Hymnal: A Worship Book")

Encounter (10-15 minutes):

1. *Invite the group to read aloud the theme from "Renewed Commitments":*
"We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms, and in all places."
2. *Invite a member of the group to read aloud the following:* Peace is a gift from God to the world, and we are invited into the grace of extending that gift. Peace is not a possession. It's not something we guard. It doesn't have borders that we police, as if we owned it. Instead, peace is a way of life, embodied in Jesus Christ, a gift of grace to the world. We have been invited to extend God's work — to let grace reach through our lives, to let Christ's peace flow through us. That's what it means to name ourselves "the body of Christ"— we live by the Spirit's grace, alive in Jesus, now commissioning us as ambassadors of the same peace that was at work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. Provide five minutes for participants to write down what hinders our communities from welcoming God's peace:
 - a. How has our congregation, our church, our faith worked against Christ's reign of peace?
 - b. How have we sinned against the Spirit's work of peace?
4. Then invite volunteers to share their insights.



Discern (10-15 minutes):

1. Read James 3:13-18 — find two or three translations to read aloud. *Read aloud the following:* The passage exposes the sin of pride and hypocrisy, while binding together the virtues of wisdom, gentleness, mercy and peace. The closing verse of the passage likens the labor of peace to working the land, planting and reaping, producing God's justice: "A harvest of righteousness/justice is sown in peace by those who make peace" (verse 18).

For discussion:

- a. Where have you seen a harvest of peace?
- b. Who planted the seeds?

Embody (20-25 minutes):

1. *Invite a member of the group to read aloud the following:* The Holy Spirit redeems the world with Christ's peace. We've been invited to join God in this labor, as the world is being reborn with the gospel of peace. In the prophetic word offered our churches in the book of Revelation, God describes a new way of organizing our lives together, represented as the biblical city of Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-4). The name "Jerusalem" means "city of peace." That's what God promises to us: peace as a new way of being together. And this gift from heaven — this community — is for everyone. "Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there" (Revelation 21:25). There are no guards, no police, no *migra*. Peace belongs to God, without gatekeepers — a gift for the world which includes us if we're willing to live according to the way of Jesus.
2. Read Revelation 21:1-4 — find two or three translations to read aloud.
 - a. *Read aloud the following:* "Death will be no more" (verse 4). The enemy of God's city of peace is death, meaning all the destructive powers unleashed into this world that conspire to kill God's beloved creation.
 - b. Discuss: How is God calling us into this new community of peace, happening all around us, through the power of the Holy Spirit?

Send (3-5 minutes):

1. Turn to #702 in the back of "Hymnal: A Worship Book" and pray the prayer in unison.
2. Read aloud Revelation 21:3-4, 22:17 as a benediction.
3. Commission the group with the words of Romans 15:33: "May the God of peace be with all of you, amen."

Theme 4: Experience Transformation

Session 4.1: Living and Worshipping Together



Session Summary

This session will emphasize ways in which the Holy Spirit's power transforms and engages us, and how we respond as we live and worship together. The leader will guide the group in examining Scriptural passages related to the renewed commitment to experience transformation individually and collectively within our various communities.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 3 (found at <http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/holy-spirit/>)
- “Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward” (Appendix A)
- Pathways Study Guide
- A picture or symbol of a dove to represent the Holy Spirit
- Whiteboard or flip chart with easel and markers, or printed table discussion questions
- Audio/visual equipment (optional) to project “Renewed Commitments” and lyrics to “Spirit of the Living God” and “All Creatures of Our God and King/O Sifuni Mungu.” (If audio/visual equipment is unavailable, please prepare copies of these for participants and/or have hymnals of your choice.)
- Index Cards (3 per participant)
- Pens or pencils
- Tables and chairs in place for individual and group interaction

Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself as the leader of this session for engaging MC USA's congregations, conferences, agencies and constituency groups in the renewed commitment to experience transformation. Each participant should have a copy of “Renewed Commitments” or it can be projected onto a screen for all to see. Welcome everyone and thank them for their willingness to participate in this process. Read the theme description:
“The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.”
Share that the subtheme to be explored in this session of the study guide is “Living and Worshipping Together.”
2. Begin with an opening prayer:
“God of love, we thank you for gathering us together on this day and in this place. We are especially grateful to be gathered into Christ's Body with many members but one Lord. We invite the Holy Spirit to dwell in and among us today. Breathe upon us, granting us inspiration and insight. Ignite us to act upon what is revealed as we are transformed in your presence. Amen.”



3. Invite the group to stand and sing the hymn “Spirit of the living God” (#349 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”) or the following internet resource:
https://hymnary.org/text/spirit_of_the_living_god_fall_iverson#authority_media_flexscores
4. Use the symbol of a dove to introduce the “Encounter” section. Although the word “dove” is mentioned many times throughout the Bible — both literally and figuratively — this session will focus on how the dove is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit as referenced in Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22 and John 1:32.

Encounter (10-15 minutes)

1. After being baptized by John, Jesus emerged from the water and a dove appeared as a symbol of the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. (Details of this encounter may be found in Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-22 and John 1:1-34.) Read Mark 1:9-13 aloud. Convey the context of the story by discussing the circumstances leading up to Jesus’ baptism and what happened immediately thereafter.
 - a. What was the role of John the Baptist, and what did he encourage onlookers to do?
 - b. What announcement did God make, as shared in Mark 1:11?
 - c. In what way(s) did the Holy Spirit transform Jesus?
 - d. After his baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, tested and finally, to triumph. How might we experience the Spirit’s transformation in times of temptation and testing?
 - e. Optional: Share a brief personal story of a time when you needed the Holy Spirit to enable and empower you to endure temptation or testing.
2. *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* The transliteration of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is *ruwach* in Hebrew which has been interpreted as wind, breath, mind and spirit. Its New Testament equivalent is transliterated as the Greek word *pneuma* (breath, wind) to represent the Holy Spirit as the third person of the triune God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. Provide time for participants to read through Article 3 of the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective” (<http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/holy-spirit/>), either silently or out loud.

Discuss:

 - a. Who is the Holy Spirit as described according to the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective?”
 - b. How does this description inform and align with our renewed commitment to experience transformation as we live and worship together?
3. *What does the Holy Spirit do?* Refer to John 14:16-17, Acts 1:8 and any Scriptures that come to mind from the group. Article 3 of the Confession of Faith may be referenced here as well.
4. *How do we receive and respond to the Holy Spirit?* Romans 10:9-10, Luke 11:9-13 and Acts 2:37-39 may be helpful in guiding discussion in reference to this question. Ask for volunteers to share their responses.
5. If time permits, discuss the main ideas found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 3:10, Psalm 133:1, Revelation 7:9 and Matthew 6:10, embracing this renewed commitment theme of experiencing transformation in and among us.



Discern (10-15 minutes)

1. Revisit the “Renewed Commitment” theme as follows:
“Experience transformation — The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God’s love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God’s beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.”
2. Distribute three index cards to each participant. Write the three questions below on the board or project them onto the screen. Ask participants to write down their responses to these questions, each on a separate index card.
 - a. God’s Spirit meets us at our point of need to convict, comfort and counsel us, revealing who we are as well as what we need to know and do as disciples of Jesus. Question 1: “Who has the Holy Spirit been to you?”
 - b. Reflect upon an instance when you needed the Holy Spirit’s wisdom or strength. Question 2: “What difference did the Spirit’s presence make in your life?”
 - c. The manifold wisdom of God is seen in the beauty and diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and the unique gifts that we offer to one another. This is one of the ways God’s Spirit works within and among us. Question 3: “Think of an encounter with someone of a different racial-ethnic group, gender or religion. How did the Holy Spirit challenge and/or inspire you through this encounter?”

Ask for volunteers to share their responses to questions 1, 2 and 3. Write individual responses in brief phrases on the whiteboard or flip chart. What common themes emerge among the group? Discuss how these common themes reflect ways in which the Spirit speaks to and works among us despite our differences.

Embody (20-25 minutes) *This section can be expanded if additional time is allowed.

The Holy Spirit transforms us so that we can reflect God’s love as we share the gospel with those around us. Using the “Renewed Commitments” theme, collaborate in table groups to discern a plan of action to experience the Spirit’s transformation individually and collectively. Divide participants into three groups and assign each group to a table. (Feel free to adapt as necessary to accommodate varying group sizes.) Each table will respond to one of the questions below. Each question can be written on the whiteboard/flip chart or projected onto a screen. (Optional: A copy of each question can be given to a facilitator chosen at each table to provoke thought, discussion and a commitment to action.) Each table also needs to choose a recorder. Allow 16 minutes for interactive table discussions and nine minutes (approximately three minutes per person) for table facilitators to share their recorded responses.

Question 1: What spiritual disciplines can we practice to yield to the Spirit in our personal and collective worship?

Question 2: How can we engage with people from a different racial-ethnic group, gender or belief to receive, show and share in God’s love?

Question 3: How can we embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel and share it with others in relevant ways?



Send (3-5 minutes)

The leader is to read this section aloud: The Holy Spirit is working within and among us to accomplish what we cannot on our own. It is the Spirit that transforms and compels us to love with compassion and conviction. Nelson Mandela profoundly stated that “our human compassion binds the one to the other — not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.” Although there are differences among us that too often divide us, there is hope for the future as we embrace transformation in our daily living and worship. Beauty can be found in all of humanity when we focus on what binds us together as members of Christ’s body.

Sing the hymn “All creatures of our God and King” (#48 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”) or from one of the following internet links:

- Traditional Rendition: <https://hymnary.org/text/all-creatures-of-our-god-and-king>
- Contemporary Rendition of “All Creatures of Our God and King / O Sifuni Mungu” by the African Children’s Choir: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpsijxAjQRE>

Closing Prayer:

“Thank you, God, for sending Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, that you came. Holy Spirit, won’t you tell us more about that lovely name? Fill us with your all consuming presence. Bind us with the unbreakable cord of your love. Transform and empower us by the Spirit as we receive your grace, joy and peace and share it with others. Help us to relate and respond to those who may not look, think or believe as we do, for therein lies the mystery, beauty and diversity of all who are created in your image and likeness. It is in Christ’s name that we pray and say, Amen.”

Questions for Leader’s Reflection:

1. What common threads surfaced in the tapestry woven by the Holy Spirit relative to:
 - a. individual understandings and expressions of how the Spirit ministers among us;
 - b. ways in which the beauty and diversity of all God’s gifts are identified in our context; and
 - c. how we move forward as ambassadors of grace, joy and peace in and beyond our communities of faith?
2. What specific learnings or storytelling would you offer to be included in the Journey Forward process from this session of the study guide?
3. Do you have any suggestions that would be helpful in making this session more effective for the leader/guide and participants? If so, please elaborate.

Session 4.2: The Power of the Holy Spirit



Session Summary

In this session, the leader will guide the group in exploring the power of the Holy Spirit as demonstrated before, on and after the day of Pentecost. Participants will discover together what happened on Pentecost in the first century, as well as how the Holy Spirit can transform us in this present age and in our journey forward. Specific passages to be discussed are Acts 1:1-8 and Acts 2:1-47. The leader will guide the group in discerning how these Scriptures can be applied within the context of professing and practicing MC USA's renewed commitment to "experience transformation" both now and in the future.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective", Article 3 (optional)
- "Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward" (Appendix A)
- A candle, candle holder and matchbook or lighter to symbolize the Holy Spirit as fire
- Whiteboard or flip chart with easel and markers
- Audio/visual equipment (optional) to project "Renewed Commitments" and song lyrics. If audio/visual equipment is unavailable, please prepare print copies and/or hymnals or song lyrics for participants.
- Several sheets of blue, orange and yellow construction paper for each table group
- Black markers for each table group
- Tables and chairs in place for individual and group interaction

Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself as the leader of this session for engaging MC USA's congregations, conferences, agencies and constituency groups in the renewed commitment to experience transformation. Read the "Renewed Commitments" theme description:
"The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel."
Share that the subtheme to be explored in this session of the study guide is "The Power of the Holy Spirit."
2. Begin with an opening prayer:
"Dear God, we acknowledge that every good and perfect gift comes from you. Thank you for the gift of salvation that was wrought through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit who counsels, convicts, comforts and changes us. Holy Spirit, we invite you to dwell within and among us today as we seek to hear from you. Enlighten and empower us so that we may be witnesses of your love, grace, joy and peace. It is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen."



3. Invite the group to sing the hymn, “Come, thou fount” (#521 in Hymnal: A Worship Book”) or the following internet link: <https://hymnary.org/hymn/GG2013/475>. For variety and inclusion, you may also invite the group to listen to the contemporary song “Fresh Fire” by Don Moen at <https://genius.com/Don-moen-fresh-fire-lyrics> or the gospel song “Fresh Fire” by Preashea Hilliard at <https://www.lyrics.com/sublyric/1252>. (Each of these songs refers to the fire of Pentecost to be explored in this session.)

Encounter (10-15 minutes)

1. Pentecost is celebrated among many Christians on the seventh Sunday after Easter (Resurrection Sunday) to commemorate the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the apostles and other disciples of Jesus who were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks. The Feast of Weeks was an Old Testament Jewish festival celebrated seven weeks after the first harvest of grain. (For the leader’s personal study if desired, refer to Exodus 23:26 & 34:22, Leviticus 23:16, Numbers 28:26 and Deuteronomy 16:9-10.)
2. Read Acts 1:1-8 and 2:1-47. You may read the passages aloud as the leader or choose people from the group to read selected scriptures. If time is limited, consider summarizing and emphasizing main ideas as you share the events of Pentecost.
3. In your own words, share the Pentecost narrative while adding details leading up to this event as told in chapter one of Acts. Light the candle to symbolize the Holy Spirit as fire (Acts 2:3).
4. Ask volunteers to share details from Pentecost that resonate with them. What feelings, images or personal stories are evoked?

Discern (10-15 minutes)

1. Review the “Renewed Commitments” theme again with an emphasis on the subtheme, “The Power of the Holy Spirit.” On the day of Pentecost, 120 followers of Jesus were gathered in one accord in one place. They had been told by Jesus to expect to receive what God had promised them. Explore the scriptures by asking and answering these questions:
 - a. What was this promise (Acts 1:8 and 2:16-18)? For whom was the Spirit’s outpouring intended (Acts 1:2, 13-15, 24-26 and 2:39)?
 - b. Why did the apostles and other disciples of Jesus need to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:8 and 2:14, 40-47)?
2. Suddenly, a sound from heaven described as “a rushing mighty wind,” came and filled the upper room where the apostles and others were gathered. Then, cloven tongues of fire appeared above each of their heads as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Wind and fire were manifestations of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Talk about the characteristics of these two elements.
 - a. What comes to mind when we think of wind?
 - b. What does wind have the capacity to do?
 - c. What is significant about fire, and what does it have the power to do?



3. Wind, fire and water are powerful physical forces. We have witnessed the effect of each element in nature. These three elements are mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 of Acts to represent ways in which God moved among God's people. While keeping this in mind, write the following questions on the board or project them onto the screen if available:
 - a. How might the Spirit's power manifest among us as wind, fire and water?
 - b. What would a move of God look like to reflect the power of Pentecost in our context?
 - c. How can we as members of MC USA participate with the Spirit to experience transformation in our journey forward?
4. Pause silently for a few minutes and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to gathered participants.

Embody (20-25 minutes) *This section can be expanded if additional time is allowed.

After allowing time for participants to gather their thoughts, ask them to share their responses with each other as they interact in table groups to complete the following activity. Invite participants to share their responses to the questions that were shared above (#3 of the "Discern" section) with each other.

1. Use the blue construction paper to represent the baptism of water as mentioned in Acts 1 and 2. Using markers, invite participants to write down words or phrases on the blue paper that reflect what needs to be repented of and cleansed from our individual and collective hearts as we are transformed by the power of the Spirit.
2. Use the yellow and orange construction paper to represent the Spirit as wind and fire. Invite participants to write down words or phrases to describe what Pentecost could possibly look like (outcomes of the Spirit's power working amongst us) in MC USA's present and future congregations and constituency groups. Challenge participants to think outside of the box and to dream of what is possible with the help of the Spirit together.
3. After the allotted time, collect the blue, yellow and orange sheets of construction paper from each table group to discuss with the entire group. What is the Spirit saying among us? Explore any connections that can be made from the events of Pentecost in the book of Acts and what Pentecost would look like in our context and churchwide. What actions are we willing to commit to so that we are transformed by the Spirit's presence and power among us now and in the future?

Send (3-5 minutes)

The leader should read this section aloud: Before Jesus was crucified, he told his disciples that the Comforter (the Spirit) would be sent to dwell among them. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples to remind them of this. As the apostles gathered in the upper room, that promise was fulfilled. Even now, the power of the Spirit is here to reprove us and the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11). As we seek to experience transformation, may we be revived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Invite participants to sing the hymn "Halleluia! Thine the glory." (Refer to this internet link: https://hymnary.org/text/we_praise_thee_o_god_for_the_son_of).



Closing Prayer (adapted from Romans 6:4 and 15:13):

“Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Now may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.

Questions for Leader’s Reflection:

1. What themes emerged relative to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit working in your local context?
2. Are there any unique stories to be told to demonstrate the practice of this renewed commitment theme and subtheme by your congregation or constituency group? If so, please share.
3. Would you be willing to participate in sharing any discoveries or commitment of actions made during this session of the study guide at the MennoCon19 convention?

Session 4.3: Revealing God's Beauty



Session Summary

In this session, participants will discuss the subtheme of “Revealing God’s Beauty” by comparing and contrasting three biblical passages: The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), The Blessing of Unity (Psalm 133) and The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12). Positive and negative implications of unity and diversity in each passage will be explored to reveal God’s beauty as expressed in the creation of all nations, tribes, people and languages. Participants will be challenged to acknowledge behavioral biases and/or prejudices that exist in their context and commit to specific practices to embrace the diversity of all God’s children and their gifts as many members of Christ’s body.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- “Renewed Commitments for MC USA: A Living Document for the Journey Forward” (Appendix A)
- Pathways Study Guide
- One kaleidoscope per table group as a symbol of the beauty of many parts working together as one. If a kaleidoscope cannot be found, consider using a picture of a stained glass window or a similar multicolored glass image or object.
- One mirror per table group as a symbol to reflect God’s image/likeness
- Memo pads for participants
- Whiteboard or flip chart with easel and markers
- Audio/visual equipment (optional) for projection of “Renewed Commitments” and song lyrics to “Jesus Loves The Little Children” and “Yes, Jesus Loves Me,” including a different language translation. If audio/visual equipment and hymnals are unavailable, please prepare printed copies of the document and song lyrics for participants.)
- Tables and chairs in place for individual and group interaction

Gather (3-5 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself as the leader of this session for engaging MC USA’s congregations, conferences, agencies and constituency groups in the renewed commitment to experience transformation. Read the “Renewed Commitments” theme description:
“The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God’s love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God’s beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.”
Share that the subtheme to be explored for this session of the study guide is “Revealing God’s Beauty.”
2. Begin with an opening prayer:
“God, we acknowledge you as the creator of all humankind and the giver of every good and perfect gift. Touch our eyes so that we may see the likeness of your image in ourselves and others. Open our ears so that we may hear the voice of your Spirit speaking to and through us. Prepare our minds and hearts to discern your will. Transform us as we seek to understand and relate to one another and the world in ways that reveal your beauty and reflect your love. In Jesus’ name we pray and say, Amen.”



3. Ask participants to reflect upon their childhood years and the songs they may have learned in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School such as “Jesus Loves the Little Children” and “Jesus Loves Me.”

English lyrics can be found at: https://hymnary.org/text/jesus_loves_the_little_children_all_the and <https://hymnary.org/hymn/PsH/page/713>.

Spanish lyrics can be found at: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/Jesus-loves-me-Jesus-loves-me.html>

Refer to the lyrics of each song as projected onto the screen or on lyric sheets.

Invite participants to stand and sing each song, followed by a verse and chorus of “Jesus Loves Me” in another language that may be represented in your congregation, constituency or affinity group.

4. Refer to the kaleidoscope (or another image/object chosen) and mirror located on each table as symbols used in this session to represent the beauty of many parts working together as one, and the reflection of God’s image and likeness in each person.

Encounter (10-15 minutes)

The leader should read this section aloud: A kaleidoscope is an optical instrument that consists of pieces of glass held together loosely at the end of a rotating tube. As the kaleidoscope tube is rotated, those same bits of glass continually change into symmetrical patterns of shapes and colors by the reflection of angled mirrors within the tube. What we see as we look inside differs each time the tube is rotated. Although each bit of glass is beautiful, the collective image formed as the pieces collide reflects the synergistic beauty of all the pieces in one optical display. However, this display cannot be seen unless each shard of glass is reflected against the angled mirrors within the tube. (If another image or object is to be used instead, adapt this explanation to illustrate the main idea here.)

1. Invite participants to pass around the kaleidoscope (or optional image/object) and mirror at each table for their viewing pleasure.
2. Assign each of the following passages of scripture to a table group to read aloud: Genesis 11:1-9 (The Tower of Babel), Psalm 133 (The Blessing of Unity) and 1 Corinthians 12 (The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts). After summarizing the main themes with the entire group, discuss how the words “babel,” “unity” and “diversity” are interpreted through the lens of these scriptural passages. Compare and contrast the details shared in each biblical reference. What additional insight can be gathered and recorded for reflection? Draw the following diagram on the whiteboard or flip chart and record responses from the group under the appropriate heading:



	Comparisons / Similarities	Contrasts / Differences	Other Insight?
The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)			
The Blessing of Unity (Psalm 133)			
The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12)			

Discern (10-15 minutes)

Review the Renewed Commitment description theme again with an emphasis on the subtheme, “Revealing God’s Beauty.” Sadly, God’s beauty is distorted when and where occurrences of racism, white privilege, prejudice, gender inequality, lack of cultural diversity, intolerance, abuse and misuse of power and other forms of unjust systemic behaviors and practices exist. Perhaps some or all of us have experienced one or more of these behaviors. It is possible to identify with either end of the spectrum as the oppressor or the victim of some form of oppression. As we take a few minutes to reflect upon our own personal journeys, what specific images or occurrences come to mind? Pause for silent reflection and ask the following questions for further discussion:

1. How has God’s beauty been distorted in your personal experiences? What feelings were evoked as a result?
2. As we examine how the unity of God’s people and the diversity of their gifts were distorted in The Tower of Babel story, what conclusions can be made?
3. What happens when different people with diverse gifts work together to fulfill God’s purpose rather than their own, as depicted in Psalm 133 and 1 Corinthians 12?

Embody (20-25 minutes) *This section can be expanded if additional time is allowed.

Invite participants to look at the beautiful optical images displayed in the kaleidoscopes and mirrors at their tables once again. Reiterate that diversity is God’s way of displaying the beauty of God’s image and likeness through our differences and with our spiritual gifts. What specific behaviors or issues need to be addressed so that the Spirit can transform our personal perspectives, congregations, agencies and institutions to reflect the beauty and diversity of gifts represented by all God’s children?



1. Invite participants to use their memo pads to brainstorm ideas and record strategies to intentionally embrace diversity in our congregations, conferences, constituency groups and denominational institutions. Share ideas and strategies with others in table groups.
2. How can we identify and effectively communicate with those who look, act and think differently than we do? As a group, list at least three ways in which to do so and attach a specific time frame to measure and achieve what has been listed.

Mention that there are resources available to assist in dismantling forms of racism, prejudice, gender bias, and other distorted behaviors that exist. Refer to these links to suggest denominational resources available: <http://mennoniteusa.org/resources/> and <https://themennonite.org/feature/mennonite-church-racism-whiteness-two-reflections/>.

For further reflection, inform participants of the Racial Ethnic Council and various Racial Ethnic groups that exist within MC USA, and how congregations, conferences, agencies and institutions can partner with one or more of these groups in an effort to intentionally embrace diversity. Refer to this link for more information: <http://mennoniteusa.org/racial-ethnic-council/>.

Send (3-5 minutes)

Revelation 4:11 (NKJV) declares, “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For you created all things, And by your will they exist and were created.” Together, we form a beautiful image as many members of Christ’s body, held together to reflect God’s likeness and love to each other and the world. Invite participants to sing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” while viewing images seen through the kaleidoscopes and mirrors provided.

Closing Prayer (adapted from Acts 17:26-27, Ephesians 2:10 and Matthew 19:14):

“Dear God, You have made from one blood every nation of people to dwell on the face of the earth. You have determined our preappointed times and the boundaries of our dwellings so that we would seek the Lord in the hope that we might grope for and find you, though you are not far from each one of us. We are your workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which you have prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Forgive us for distorting your beauty. Help us to embrace your likeness in the people with whom we interact from this day forward. Lead us as we discover and deploy the spiritual gifts within and among us. We come to you as little children with a desire to represent the kingdom of heaven on earth. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.”

Questions for Leader’s Reflection:

1. Are there any unique stories that emerged during this session to reveal God’s beauty in ways that haven’t been acknowledged before in your context? If so, please share them.
2. Would you and/or participants from your group be willing to participate in storytelling at MennoCon19?
3. Is there any insight regarding inclusion and/or possible resources for diversity training that you’d like to offer as we continue in the Journey Forward process?



There's still more to the "Pathways" study guide! Visit mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward to find:

A Final Capstone Session

The capstone can be used as the final session (5th or 13th) and provides the opportunity for participants to review and pray for the ways the Living Word is moving in our midst.

The Feedback Survey

Your responses are an important part of this process! Please have your group's leader or designated recorder visit the online survey to submit responses based on your group's "Pathways" engagement by Dec. 31, 2018. This will make it possible to share themes across the denomination and inform the focus of the MC USA delegate assembly at MennoCon19.

Visit mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward.



Renewed Commitments for MC USA

A Living Document for the Journey Forward Process¹

God invites us to experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation. We yearn to know and share in the mystery of God's unending love.

We confess that sin fragments our wholeness and strains our relationships with God, each other and the world. Confronted with the misuses of power in our lives, communities and institutions, we seek to tell the truth and repent.

The Holy Spirit beckons us toward the restoration of all things in Christ. God continually calls us beloved.² On this journey together, we commit to: :

Follow Jesus

As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost.³

Witness to God's peace

We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms, and in all places.⁴

Experience transformation

The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.⁵

¹ *Journey Forward* refers to a two-year process of church-wide discernment growing out of the Future Church Summit held in Orlando in 2017. JF has two primary documents for church use: this living document and an interactive study guide. The feedback gathered from congregations, conferences, constituency groups and church agencies will shape future improvements to this document in preparation for delegate engagement in Kansas City in 2019.

² Genesis 1, Psalm 24:1, Luke 15:11-31, John 3:16-17, Ephesians 3:19, Romans 5:8

³ 2 Kings 23:1-3, Isaiah 61:1-2, Mark 8:34, Luke 4:17-19, Ephesians 4:1-6, Hebrews 1:1-4

⁴ Isaiah 9:6, Micah 6:6-8, Matthew 5:38-48, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Ephesians 4:32

⁵ Psalm 133:1, John 14:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 3:10, Revelation 7:9

Appendix B: Journey Forward Worship Resources

Introduction

Journey Forward is Mennonite Church USA's churchwide renewal process of engaging in scripture, storytelling and sharing how God is at work in the lives of people and congregations across MC USA. It grows out of the Future Church Summit and the Renewed Commitments of Mennonite Church USA. At the heart of the commitments are three core values of MC USA: 1) Follow Jesus; 2) Witness to God's Peace; and 3) Experience Transformation. These core values not only reflect the heart of who we are as contemporary Anabaptists, but can serve as central themes in the ongoing journey of shaping the church's future.

In its very essence, worship is a human means for ascribing worth to God (from Old English *worthship*). At the same time, worship has a formational function. Worship is a space we enter in which we not only encounter God, but allow our identity as a people to be shaped by the worship experience. The prayers, rituals, hymns, readings, sermons, offerings and benedictions of worship create a world of worship that forms and shapes our individual and corporate identity in Christ. Through gathered worship, the church becomes the church.

With this formational dynamic in mind, the following resources are intended to continue forming the church around those shared values that will lead us into a renewed future.

These worship resources draw from the resources and themes in Journey Forward's Pathways study guide, which will be sent to all MC USA congregations in June 2018. They are framed by the four main themes::

- Identity and Context
- Follow Jesus
- Witness to God's Peace
- Experience Transformation

These resources can be used on their own or as a complementary resource for practicing worship along with the Pathways study guide, which encourages small groups to engage in scripture and storytelling about how the Holy Spirit is moving in their churches and communities.

Theme One: Identity and Context

Focus: As God's beloved community, our true identity is grounded in God's good creation. As we see our faces reflected in God's goodness and love, we recognize our own human frailty and sin. We fly, as it were, with broken wings. God's love heals and restores us to God's primal intent for the redemption of all creation.

Call to Worship: Psalm 24:1-6 (NRSV)

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Invocation (from "Pathways Study Guide")

For this reason we bow our knees before our Maker,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
We pray that, according to the riches of God's glory,
God may grant that we may be strengthened in our inner beings with power through the Spirit,
and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith,
as we are being rooted and grounded in love.

We pray that we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Praise Hymn: "The Love of God," #44 in "Sing the Journey"

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

In the light of your love for us all, we confess, Gracious God, that we have failed to fully express and extend your love to all. For we have all fallen short of the glory of God. In your grace and mercy in Jesus Christ you have created us and redeemed us for eternal life. We humbly ask for your forgiveness that frees us to be who you created us to be.

Assurance of Forgiveness (Genesis 1:31 NRSV)

God saw everything that (God) had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Hymn: “Jesus, the very thought of thee,” #588 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”

Reading the Word: Ephesians 3:19-19 (NRSV)

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Proclaiming the Word: Sermon Seeds for preaching on Ephesians 3:19-19:

1. Set the text in the broader context of the central theme of the church as the body of Christ in Ephesians. The unity of the church is uppermost in the author’s mind as this diverse community is addressed. Explore how the church’s comprehension of the vastness of God’s love can create a communal identity of unity in diversity.
2. Explore the superiority of love to knowledge through God’s nature, the story of Christ and the church.
3. Illustrate the love of God through concrete stories expressed in the history and life of your particular congregation and its members.

Blessing the Offering

Bounteous God, bless these gifts as seeds of your wondrous love that we spread across the church and out into the world. May they not only symbolize our love for you, but your life-giving love for the world through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sending Hymn: “The Lord lift you up,” #73 in “Sing the Journey”

Sending

It is the hands of God that have created us. It is the grace of Christ that has redeemed us. It is the wind of the Spirit that blows us forth into the world as God’s beloved community.

Arts and Movement in Worship

1. Create an outline of the “body of Christ” (image of Jesus) on large paper on a table at the sanctuary entrance. Above the image, write “1 Corinthians 12:27: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” Have designated persons invite church members to write their names within the body image before entering the sanctuary as a visual reminder that they come together and form the “body of Christ” in all its diversity.
2. For the Assurance of Forgiveness have each half of the congregation turn toward each other and pronounce to the other side the words of Genesis 1:31.

Theme Two: Follow Jesus

Focus: Discipleship can simply be defined as following Jesus, but since the earthly Jesus is not with us, discipleship or following Jesus calls for an imaginative, creative and faithful interaction with the living spirit of Christ through scriptural interpretation, church tradition, prayer, spiritual discernment and communal formation. The story of Jesus in the Gospels is our primary source for following in the way of Jesus. Worship is the sacred space where the church is formed by the story of Jesus.

Call to Worship

God calls out to all who would follow.

God calls us in creation and within the human heart.

God calls us in scripture and through the church.

God calls us in history and human experience.

God calls us to life and wholeness.

God calls us to healing and hope.

God calls us to follow in the way of Jesus.

God calls out to all who would follow.

Invocation

We hear you call, Beckoning God, in our quivering moments of prayer. You call us this morning to worship in this particular gathered community of sisters and brothers. We will listen for your Word in song and silence, in prayer and proclamation, in human voice and the holy ordinary. Speak to us in such a way that we are drawn along your sacred path. Speak to us in such a way that we are drawn further down the path of Jesus that leads us into our ever changing world in need of your compassion and grace. We pray in the name and example of our leader and teacher, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Praise Hymn: “Come and See,” #20 in “Hymnal: a Worship Book”

Prayer of Confession

We have followed the ways of the world more than the ways of Christ, forgiving God. Our hands have built walls instead of tearing them down. We have comforted ourselves more than others. Our love for one another has not burned bright enough for the world to see it. So, forgive us, merciful God, and direct us back to the path that Christ has trod. Set our feet to walking in the path of peace. Ignite our hearts with the flame of justice. Bind us together with the cords of Christ’s love so that they may know we are Christians by our love.

Assurance of Forgiveness (1 John 1:9 NRSV)

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Hymn: “I want to walk as a child of the light,” #95 in “Sing the Journey”

Reading the Word: John 13:34-35 (NRSV)

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Proclaiming the Word: Sermon Seeds for preaching on John 13:34-35

1. Reflect on how love is freely expressed and love as commandment. In constructing the sermon, create the tension/resolution by first showing how love cannot be commanded with concrete examples. Resolve the sermon by showing how love can be a commandment that one follows, making sure to give powerful stories of people following the command to love.
2. Explore how loving one another is following in the way of Jesus. Tell in descriptive detail several stories of Jesus' love for others and how those stories are imitated (imitation Christi) or lived out in real contemporary life.
3. We live in a world that can be cynical about religion, and Christianity in particular, through the division and duplicity that people often see. Create a sermon around the idea that the only way the world around us will know we are followers of Jesus is by our common love for one another.

Commitment to Discipleship

Following the sermon, invite the congregation to respond to the call to discipleship through 1) a renewal of their baptismal vows; 2) a commitment to serve Christ through the church; 3) a challenge to serve Christ in the community.

Invite the congregation to share together in this communal commitment:

We commit ourselves to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost.

Provide a time of silence for the congregants to make their own personal commitments to discipleship.

Hymn of Commitment: "I bind my heart this tide," #411 in "Hymnal: a Worship Book"

Sending: Invite the congregation to raise their arms and loudly respond:

In sun or in rain

God will guide our feet!

In triumph or in tragedy

God will guide our feet!

In joy or in sorrow

God will guide our feet!

In life or in death

God will guide our feet!

In faith and in hope

God will guide our feet!

Sending Hymn: “Guide my Feet,” #546 in “Hymnal: a Worship Book”

Art and Movement in Worship

1. Cut out numerous paper footprints and place them in a path from the back to the front of the sanctuary. Place a fishing net at the entrance of the sanctuary with a sign that reads: “What are the nets that I must cast aside to truly follow Jesus?”
2. At the Reading of the Word invite the congregation to all join hands and look at those around them as the scripture is read.

Theme Three: Witness to God’s Peace

Focus: Peace permeates the New Testament and the story of Jesus. It is a central teaching of the Anabaptist tradition. Peace is not the mere absence of war, but encompasses the call to justice and reconciliation. Peace and justice are inextricably intertwined. According to the prophet Micah and other prophets, worship of God is empty without the presence of justice.

Call to Worship: Micah 6:6-8 (NRSV)

With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?

***Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?***

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

***Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”***

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
***but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?***

Invocation

God of justice and peace, we acknowledge that we take a risk each time we come before you in worship. You desire justice, kindness, and humility more than hymns of praise or the offerings of the fruit of our labors. With what shall we come before you today as an offering, if it is not our very lives bound to do justice and peace? We humbly ask that you accept our worship today as it is in harmony with the embodiment of your Word in our daily lives. Amen.

Praise Hymn: “What does the Lord require,” #409 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”

Prayer of Confession Sung response: “Kyrie Eleison,” #144 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book.”

We confess, loving God, that we have been quick to judge others
but slow to forgive our neighbors, let alone our enemies.

Sing: Kyrie eleison

We have often engaged in division and strife
in our personal lives and among our churches.

Sing: Kyrie eleison

We have accepted peace as not going to war
but have neglected to do justice for the poor and marginalized.

Sing: Kyrie eleison

We, who are called a people of peace, are in desperate need
of your mercy and forgiveness.

Sing: Kyrie eleison

Assurance of Forgiveness: (Philippians 4:7 NRSV)

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.

Hymn: “We are people of God’s peace,” #407 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”

Reading the Word: Ephesians 2:14-17 (NRSV)

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, so 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.

Proclaiming the Word: Sermon Seeds for preaching on Ephesians 2:14-17

1. Study the divided nature of the church of Ephesus as a context for the epistle’s proclamation of peace between opposing ethnic/social groups (Jewish and Gentile believers). Bring this home with an examination of polarized groups in the church and society today (verse 14).
2. Connect the redemptive work of Christ with peace between divided people (verse 13). Connect peace with God to peace with neighbor.
3. Explore the need for witness/proclamation of peace in a world bent on violence and injustice (verse 17).

Confessing Our Faith (from “Renewed Commitments for MC USA”)

We are called to extend God’s holistic peace,

proclaiming Christ’s redemption for the world with our lives.

Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation.

We bear witness to this gift of peace

by rejecting violence and resisting injustice

in all forms, and in all places.

Blessing the Offering

We will not forget the words of Isaiah, God of justice, as we offer our monetary gifts. So we also offer to you the gifts of peacemaking and justice, seeking to embody them in our lives, lest we worship in vain. Accept these gifts as but a small token of our desire for a world in which the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the homeless are sheltered, enemies are reconciled and justice reigns over the land. Through the Prince of Peace, even Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Sending

For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Sending Hymn: “You shall go out with joy,” #427 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book” (with clapping!)

Arts and Movement in Worship

1. During the singing of “You shall go out with joy!” Have a small group with tambourines (and dancers?) lead the congregation out of the sanctuary while singing.
2. Within the bulletin, provide a red heart-shaped piece of paper. Make sure pencils are distributed around the congregation. Before the offering, invite the people to write down a commitment to do some act of kindness, love, peacemaking, or justice seeking they offer to perform over the weeks ahead as a gift to God and place it in the offering plates.

Theme Four: Experience Transformation

Focus: The Holy Spirit is God’s transforming power. The Spirit is the flame of God’s love, the unseen wind of God’s movement within the church and world. Transformation is rarely smooth, simple or easy. Transformation is often disruptive. Worship is intended as a sacred space where we encounter the transforming and disruptive power of the Spirit.

Call to Worship

Holy Spirit, dwell among us.

Holy Spirit, dwell within us.

Holy Spirit, come as fire.

Holy Spirit, come as wind.

Holy Spirit, ignite us with passion.

Holy Spirit, blow upon the embers of our hearts.

Holy Spirit, gather us as one.

Holy Spirit, send us forth into the world.

Invocation (from “Pathways Study Guide”)

God of love, we thank you for gathering us together on this day and in this place. We are especially grateful to be gathered into Christ’s body with many members but one Lord. We invite the Holy Spirit to dwell in and among us today. Breathe upon us, granting us inspiration and insight. Ignite us to act upon what is revealed as we are transformed in your presence. Amen.

Praise Hymn: “Holy Spirit, come with power,” #26 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”

Prayer of Confession

Spirit of the Living God, we confess that we live in a world of cold rationality, computers, paper reports, order and business as usual that encroaches upon worship. Too often worship has become so rote and routine that we can walk through it with eyes blindfolded. We cling for dear life to our order of worship lest the Spirit of “holy disorder” enter and disrupt what we have planned for ourselves. Come, Holy Disruptor, and break in upon us with divine surprise, rip open the veil that covers our eyes, and unsettle us with sacred joy!

Assurance of the Spirit: Unison (John 3:8 NRSV)

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Hymn: “Spirit of God! descend,” #502 in “Hymnal: A Worship Book”

Prayer of Illumination

Spirit of God, descend upon our hearts and minds. Open our ears to hear your word with a new freshness. Open our minds and illuminate the truth for our day and time. Empower our hands and feet to live out your word concretely within our own world. We pray in the name of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reading the Word: Mark 1:9-11 (NRSV)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Proclaiming the Word: Sermon Seeds for preaching on Mark 1:9-11

1. Jesus’ baptism takes place at the beginning of his public ministry and his divine commission and anointing for mission and ministry. Explore how our baptism is our commission and anointing by the Spirit for mission and ministry and how the church as a whole is “ordained” to mission and ministry.
2. Traditionally, we have thought of the Holy Spirit as the divine comforter. Jesus’ baptism by the Spirit sent him forth to interrupt “religion as usual,” to challenge established religious authority and “turn the world upside down.” Proclaim the Holy Spirit in the story of Jesus as “Divine Disruptor or Discomforter.”

3. Jesus' baptism by the Spirit is his transformation from Galilean carpenter to Spirit empowered Servant of God. Connect this to our own transformation by the Spirit as empowered and gifted servants of God.

Affirmation of Faith: Unison (from "Renewed Commitments for MC USA")

The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship, the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.

Blessing the Offering

We offer to you, giving God, not only our monetary gifts to extend the work of your reign of justice, peace and mercy, but we also offer the many gifts of the Spirit that you have showered upon us that are meant to serve the common good of the church and the world. Bless these offerings to these divine ends we pray. Amen.

Sending

May God pour upon you the blessings of heaven! May Christ fill you with living waters! May the Holy Spirit rain down God's love upon all people!

Sending Hymn: "Rain down," #49 in "Sing the Journey"

Arts and Movement in Worship

1. During the sending forth of the congregation at the end of the service, have a number of church leaders walking through the congregation with bowls of water (a symbol of the outpouring of the Spirit) and lightly sprinkling the congregants while the benediction is being spoken and/or while the final hymn is sung.
2. Create paper "tongues of fire" that can be hung over the heads of the congregation as they enter the sanctuary, attached to stings, on a mobile or somehow attached to the ceiling as symbols of the Holy Spirit.



Worship resources created by Leo Hartshorn.

He is retired after more than 40 years of church ministry in California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Oregon. He has served as Minister of Peace and Justice for Mennonite Mission Network, cofounded Drumming for Peace, and was an adjunct professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary (UCC) and Eastern Mennonite University's Lancaster extension. Leo has written for numerous publications and a book *Interpretation and Preaching as Communal and Dialogical Practices: an Anabaptist Perspective* (Edwin Mellen Press). Leo serves on the Gresham (Oregon) Art Committee and plays drums in Blues Battalion. He has been married for 45 years to Iris de León-Hartshorn, Director of Transformative Peacemaking for MC USA. They have three adult children, two grandchildren, and live in Portland, Oregon.

Appendix C: Future Church Summit Outcomes Report

Themes: What draws us to this faith?

- Strong sense of community, caring and mutual connection
- Centrality of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ
- Being a peace church: living out faith through service and justice
- We experience God's Spirit in community
- Sense of welcome and belonging, which comes from being received as family
- Priesthood of all believers, active participation in discernment and mutually sharing our gifts
- Singing our theology by making music together
- Interpreting Scripture through the lens of Jesus, together
- Mutual aid economics - sharing our lives and resources with one another
- Radical orientation to Christ and nonconformity to the world.
- Faith as a voluntary choice -- Anabaptist values rather than "ethnic heritage"
- Awareness and Connection to the broader world. Emphasis on building global community. Expressing fellowship with the broader world.
- God is in the margins

Themes: Significant learnings from our history

- There are important histories missing from the timeline, Latino, Asians, Russians, General Conference...
- The church reflects the culture of its members
- Continually lost groups and members over an unwillingness to accept change and embrace transition (women, cars, LGBTQ, wearing a tie, women's rights, etc.)
- Maintained many distinctives through the years ... Peace witness, Jesus focus
- Blinded to the ways that our separatism privileged us and would shape us in unexpected ways.
- Long tension between congregational and denomination bases of power
- Difficulty in finding healthy ways to engage with diverse cultures in our world.
- The movement was splintered from the beginning - Its always been messy - well intentioned people make mistakes

Themes: What might this mean for us going forward?

- Coming to terms with, knowing about and learning from our complete, diverse histories (USA and global)
- Model humility and practice repentance. Do not repeat past and present wrongs.
- Institutional relationships might need to change. Do they have the capacity to change? And who gets to decide what those changes will be?
- Splits have happened and will continue to happen. How will we work through the tension while caring for each other?

Themes: Things that we affirm and take forward

- Jesus-centered community that cares for each other, studies scripture together, discerns the moving of the Spirit, and lives out our faith
- Witness for peace in time of turmoil - "Saying no to war and yes to peace"
- Being Church in the World: Mission mindedness qualified with cultural sensitivity

- Mission and service institutions and global engagement -- MCC, MDS, MMN, CPT, MWC
- Our struggle to become a multicultural/racial and diverse church
- Adaptation over time while maintaining our distinctiveness
- Affirmation of women in ministry and the full use of women's gifts
- The Holy Spirit in worship
- Music and Singing together
- Nonconformity to empire ("materialism and nationalism") -- speaking truth, simple living and quirkiness

Themes: Things to lament, transform and/or let go

- Racism in church -- Centrality of white identity
- Boundaries of church that exclude -- insider/outsider mentality
- Complicity in colonialism/colonialistic approach to mission
- Painful patterns of splitting/division
- Not all stories being honored -- Difficulty in recognizing the various expressions of "being Mennonite"
- In the Timeline exercise last night -- stories of Latinos and others were missing
- Assimilation to dominate culture and using assimilation to white Mennonite culture to deal with differences
- Passive aggressive avoidance of issues in the name of respectful dialogue
- Misuse/abuse of power -- sexual abuse, institutional, violence towards POC and LGBTQ people
- Marginalization of people of color, women, LGBTQ people
- We haven't totally merged as MC USA; there were and are painful parts of the merger.
- Complicity and silence about process, systems and structures that cause harm
- Declining focus on spiritual vitality and formation

Themes: What are the implications of having diverse identities within our church?

- More voices means we need to find more creative ways to be patient and listen.
- Diversity in our communities gives us access to a spectrum of God's gifts
- A more just distribution of power and resources in the Church and churches
- Be mindfull of power and how it effects marginalized voices.
- We struggle together with the boundaries of our church body--regarding our biblical vision for inclusion/exclusion
- Change brings a fear of the unknown (loss of friends, relationships, pushed too far)
- Staying in conversation about diversity requires spiritual discipline
- One size may not fit all. Find our niche as congregations and figure out where we can minister effectively.
- Holy spirit is present and unruly
- It's complicated, beautiful and messy all at same time

Themes: How can we be constructive in living with our differences?

- Intentionally putting Christ in the center
- Choosing and celebrating diversity -- intentionally and with commitment
- Commitment to stay at the table
- Love and respect one another -- listen without judgment
- Finding methods to engage in our different stories -- taking on the responsibility to educate ourselves about race, class and economic issues
- Pay the theme team
- We need a strong center in order to embrace our diverse identities -- a common mission and vision that emerges from the whole and binds us together
- Listen. Learn. Change. Repeat.
- Diversity is complex and messy
- Diversity in action is: challenging, changing, disrupting, transforming structures and processes of power
- Creating “brave” spaces: acknowledging we’ll make mistakes, accepting accountability

Themes: What can we take action on in response to the World’s needs?

- Economic injustice: Confronting consumerism and addressing the disparity between poor and wealthy
- Immigration: tending to the undocumented
- Isolation. Loneliness. Individualism. Polarization. Fear.
- Entering in to solidarity with those who are fearful, oppressed and vulnerable
- Widening economic, political, and ideologocial divisions
- Climate change/ care for creation
- Refugee crisis
- Racism
- Racism connected to police brutality and mass incarceration
- Wars and violence
- Human rights -- women, people of color -- personal and institutional
- Interreligious relationship building (e.g. Muslims and Christians)
- Nationalism. We need to bear witness to the Beloved Community that Christ makes possible.
- Sexual violence
- Health crises -- including mental, physical, spiritual health and drug addiction-- as well as healthcare systems that are broken and inaccessible.
- Sharing the gospel and inviting people to a faith community following Jesus
- Loving your neighbor as yourself and love your enemy as your neighbor

Themes: What does it mean for us to follow Jesus as Anabaptists in the 21st Century?

- Create alternative, counter cultural communities
- Live “upside-down” Kingdom - Sermon on Mount
- Speak truth to power, stand with the marginalized, look for Jesus on the margins
- The church witness should be the full shalom of God-- salvation, justice, and peace together.

- Bold humility in risk taking, in repentance, in hope -- living in joy and love as a demonstration of God's love
- Start with regular immersion in Scripture and contemplative prayer, intentionally nurturing maturing spirituality
- Be a "people of the book"- continue to be a biblically based church that studies the Bible together and discerns where the Spirit is moving. Scriptures that were referenced:
 - Sermon on the Mount, Jonah, Isaiah, Micah 6:8, Psalm 136, Matthew 5, Matthew 14:22-33, Matthew 25, Luke 4, Luke 8:43-48, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 16:1-13, Mark 2:1-12, Mark 6:31-44, John 4:1-42, John 12:1-8, Acts 10:1-11:18, Revelation 7:9, Jesus' parables and Paul & Barnabas
- Partner with other Anabaptists, other denominations and other groups in shared work -- we can't do it all ourselves.
- Learn from gifts and voices of global church
- Engage creation care issues locally, nationally and globally
- Look at our structures and be willing to try new things (such as this process) that bring new voices to the table.
- Evangelical faith
- Restorative justice approach in our work places, prison systems
- Act locally -- build relationships and meet needs in our local context

Themes: What do we gain with MCUSA?

- Community provides a sense of belonging, connection, family and dear friends
- Access to resources such as education, experience, wisdom and professional development, stewardship, mission opportunities, camps
- Print materials like Leader, bulletins, Hymnal resources, and Sunday school materials
- Salary and benefits guidelines, MLI database, covenant of understanding, ministerial handbook
- Leadership development resources through colleges and universities and denomination
- Anabaptist Vision, Identity & Heritage
- Pastoral support, accountability, and resourcing
- Greater awareness of the perspectives and needs of the diverse parts of our body that aren't necessarily in local congregations
- Collective influence and impact
- We have a bigger voice together to speak up on big issues (creation care, peace, missions)
- Like a marriage, some things would be easier to do on your own, but other things are done better even though there are some headaches along the way

Themes: Relating within a shared denomination

- A federation of conferences where the denominational office:
 - Coordinates support for the ministry of congregations (where the Spirit leads local discernment)
 - Nurtures relationship among conferences and congregations
 - Organizes joint ventures that promote our vision
 - Rework our confession of faith (e.g. Mennonite World Conference seven shared convictions)
 - Empower young adult involvement
- Values for our relationships
 - Jesus as center of our faith
 - Grace to one another
 - Trust in the way the Holy Spirit
 - Shared spiritual practices, shared stories, shared worship
 - Congregations relate to one another as adult siblings
- Yieldedness to God, trust in brave and generative faithfulness

Themes: Important things we do together

- Worship and sing together
- Share life together in community of faith
- Eat together
- Have fun and be joyful together
- Shared mission and engaging in service together
- Building relationships and sharing stories together
- Pray with and for each other
- Extend God's Shalom
- Grapple with our faith and with scripture -- Disagree together
- Engage in Mutual aid and support
- Continue to read scripture together
- Integrating difference through finding new ways of being and doing
- Work together for peace and justice, for example: addressing creation care and prison reform.
- Advocate and Protest
- Providing service and education opportunities for youth and young adults
- Doing good theology together
- Doing things together that we can't do alone

Appendix D: Helpful Links

Journey Forward website:

mennoniteusa.org/journeyforward

Renewed Commitments:

[http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JF- -DRAFT-Document-V3.pdf](http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JF--DRAFT-Document-V3.pdf)

Frequently Asked Questions:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JF-Frequently-Asked-Questions.pdf>

Meet the Writing Team:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/meet-the-team/>

Future Church Summit Outcomes Report:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Future-Church-Summit-Outcomes-Report.pdf>

Search 'Future Church Summit Discussion' on youtube.com

