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# DELEGATE ASSEMBLY 2022

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## One Body, One Church

### **Purpose**

Just as Paul prayed for the churches of his time, let us also pray. The purpose of this daily prayer guide is help us pray with and for our delegates and church leaders participating in the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly during the four sessions of the assembly. Spiritual discernment of the church should be undergirded with sincere prayer for guidance regarding the various important decisions to be made. This prayer guide offers a resource for combining and focusing our prayers for guidance.

For your reference, visit [MennoniteUSA.org/sda22\\_schedule](https://MennoniteUSA.org/sda22_schedule) for the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly schedule.

We also encourage congregations to commit to prayer as a community. Please let us know that your congregation will be praying for the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, so that we can share this to encourage our delegates: [MennoniteUSA.org/prayer\\_fasting](https://MennoniteUSA.org/prayer_fasting)

### **Friday, May 27**

#### **Focus of This Session**

The delegates will gather this evening for common worship. "Common" not in the sense of "ordinary," but as in "mutual" or "corporate." The church gathers, not as separate individuals, but as one Body of Christ to share together in the practices of offering to God praise, prayer and partnership.

#### **Focal Scriptures**

Ephesians 2: 11-14, 17-22; 4:1-6

#### **Reflections**

Western individualistic culture has an innate resistance to thinking communally and corporately. Our individuality and independence colors our approach to reading the Bible, understanding and being the church. Even worship can be understood as "Me worshipping my God." As the delegate assembly gathers for worship, it does so as a one Body of Christ with one faith, one hope and one baptism.

It is of supreme significance for the church to firmly acknowledge its essential unity in Christ as a priority over its various viewpoints and differences of opinion on any specific ethical or theological perspective. Otherwise, decision-making is not a practice of discerning God's direction at a particular moment in the church's life, but simply becomes an exertion of our individual wills or an exercise in "power politics." The church is bound together by a common faith in Christ, hope in being God's people within the world and baptism, which unites us as one people representing Christ's corpus (body) to the world.

Christ is our peace. Christ has broken down all the walls that divide us. In baptism, we have become one in Christ, literally the body of Christ's presence to the world. As the delegates gather for worship, discernment and decision-making, may we join them in prayer and may we be united as one church in Christ.

### **Meditative Prayer**

This is a prayer that can serve as a Christian mantra (a repetitive, focusing, meditative phrase) prayed throughout the day: Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3.

### **Common Prayer**

Uniting God, make us one in heart, prayer, love and discernment of your will for the church during this assembly. We come together through prayer with our own individual minds, thoughts, experiences and perspectives and pray that we can celebrate the diversity within your church. Above our individuality, we recognize our common faith, hope and love for you and your church. Grant our delegates the strength to maintain these bonds of unity in the heat of disagreements and the passion of personal perspectives. Our hope is the discernment of your will for the church above our personal desires and to seek in every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace through Jesus Christ. We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God above all, in all and through all. Amen.

## **Saturday, May 28**

### **Focus of This Session**

Although the church is, in essence, one Body of Christ through baptism, there have been those who have been marginalized, sidelined and excluded. Acknowledging where we have broken our essential oneness as Christ's body calls for turning from our fractured nature and becoming a transformed and a transforming agent in the world by proclaiming and enacting our essential unity in Christ.

## **Focal Scriptures**

Colossians 1:15-20; Romans 13:8-10

## **Reflections**

Colossians acknowledges that Christ is preeminent over, not only the church, but all of creation. In Christ, all things hold together. Through Christ, God reconciled all things, making peace through the cross. It is this ultimate unifying principle that makes division in the church anathema. For the first century church, the division was between Jew and Gentile, two different ethnic groups. These divisions were not trivial matters over different cultural practices within the church. They were deep-seated differences that impacted the very nature of the church and eventually overcame them to become one mixed and diverse church.

For the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, there may be different divisions, and some may seem to impact one's very understanding of the nature of the church. But, the essential unity of the Body of Christ is what remains the overarching truth that would keep the church from dividing over different views of any particular contemporary issue.

Being a faithful church and a witness to the world may not be about coming down on the "right" side of a particularly divisive moral or theological issue. The church's central mandate is to "love one another." Loving one another amid our differences is the way to transform the church and to be a transforming agent within the world.

## **Meditative Prayer**

This is a prayer that can serve as a Christian mantra (a repetitive, focusing, meditative phrase) prayed throughout the day: Owe no one anything, except to love one another. Romans 13:8.

## **Common Prayer**

Gracious and forgiving God, we confess that throughout our history the church has been divided and exclusive of those who differ from us. Forgive us when we forget our oneness in Christ and that we make up the one Body of Christ in the world. Forgive us for excluding, ignoring, wounding and destroying our own people over things that are less ultimate than our love for one another. Transform us into the people that we need to be in order to witness to the world of a new reality, a new community and a new kind of love that is beyond love for those who are like us. Make us one people, for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **Sunday, May 29**

### **Focus of This Session**

What does it mean to be the Body of Christ together? How do we govern our lives together in such a way that includes rather than excludes, heals rather than wounds, moves us forward rather than backward, and honors Christ rather than any one viewpoint? These are questions for the church to prayerfully consider and decide upon, not for all time, but for this specific time in its history and context.

### **Focal Scriptures**

1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 3:12-17

### **Reflections**

The church is one body with many members. This biblical truth has been often taken too lightly or as a simple metaphor (e.g., The church is one with a lot of people in its membership). The truth of the church's nature is much deeper and "meaning-full." In its deeper truth, this scripture means that there are not Roman Catholic, German Lutheran, African Methodist Episcopal, Anabaptist-Mennonite, Southern Baptist, conservative or liberal churches. There is only one, undivided church! The text stands as a witness against multiple churches, divided by country, region, race, ethnicity, denomination or theological differences, whose differences take priority over the church's unity. The church is one.

Not only that, but the church is "one body." Not some generic body, as in "a group of people," but "the Body of Christ!" Through its witness as one people in Christ, the church embodies Christ's presence within the world. This thought should send chills up our collective spine! And the "many members" of the church should not be reduced to having one's name on the church roll of some local congregation. The various people in their differing gifts, viewpoints, roles, backgrounds and peculiarities make up the differing parts of the Body of Christ within the world. Again, another profound concept. The church as one unified body with all its differences, functions, gifts and particularities embodies the witness of Christ's presence in the world today! Mind blowing!

So then, who are we to say that the church should be one big eye, foot or schnozzola! Or who can say, "The ear, toe or mouth do not belong!" The church is one, the Body of Christ in the world, with its many different and divergent members, together bear witness to Christ's presence in the world. If that truth doesn't impact how the church governs itself and treats its many members, I don't know what will.

## **Meditative Prayer**

This is a prayer that can serve as a Christian mantra (a repetitive, focusing, meditative phrase) prayed throughout the day: Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Colossians 3:15.

## **Common Prayer**

God of the church, in all its quirky, peculiar and scary differences, we are your people. You have made us one in Christ and have engrafted us into one body, the Body of Christ. Through this new reality brought about by Christ, those things that defined us as separate, unique, differing and peculiar individuals have been superseded by our unity in the one Body of Christ. We give thanks for our inclusion into the church by grace and not merit, lest we boast. Forgive us when we have excluded anyone baptized into Christ's body. Renew our commitment to being one church with many divergent members. Teach us to love one another as we love and appreciate the different parts of our own bodies. We pray in the unity of God, the Christ, one God above all, in all, and through all. Amen

## **Monday, May 30**

### **Focus of This Session**

The focus of this session is on Justice and Accessibility. Fair treatment and inclusion go hand in hand. One cannot treat people fairly or with justice and be excluded at the same time. Even when temporary exclusion may be called for, restoration must be part of justice making. Everyone wants and expects to be treated justly and fairly in society and even more so within the church. The church must be ever vigilant to bring closer to its center those who have been pushed to the periphery, particularly those who have been disadvantaged or marginalized.

### **Focal Scriptures**

Luke 4:18-29; 1 Corinthians 12:7

### **Reflections**

A church that follows in the way of Jesus will emulate his agenda and mission. In his hometown synagogue at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus defined his agenda and mission by reading from the prophet Isaiah. Surprising enough, he did not read a Hebrew prophecy about the coming Messiah sent to save the people from their sins. He did not read a text about the miracles of God or a heavenly kingdom coming.

Jesus read about an anointing of the Spirit to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight for the blind, and freeing the oppressed. In other words, the focus of Jesus messianic (anointed one) mission was in essence to bring justice and healing to God's people.

Jesus' message was initially welcomed, until he further defined his mission with a bit of storytelling about how God accepted and affirmed people outside their own community, strangers and foreigners, the excluded other. Then, the people wanted to take Jesus for a long walk off a short cliff!

This text begs the question today: Who are the poor, marginalized, wounded, broken, oppressed, captive, those left out, forgotten, disadvantaged and excluded in our midst? Are they at the heart of the church's mission? Are they even on our agenda? As a member of Christ's body, doesn't everyone have a gift to offer to the church? Maybe the church's priorities need to be rearranged to better match Jesus' mission and the very nature of the church as Christ's diverse body. What does this imply about the resolutions before the church in this delegate assembly?

### **Meditative Prayer**

This is a prayer that can serve as a Christian mantra (a repetitive, focusing, meditative phrase) prayed throughout the day: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12: 7.

### **Common Prayer**

God of justice and peace, you have told us what is good and what is required of us, to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you. In Jesus, you defined your earthly mission as bringing good news to the poor and release to the captive. Too often, the focus of our time and energies within the church have been expended on trivialities or agendas less worthy than your call to justice and mercy.

Forgive us when we have forgotten or ignored "the least of these" our siblings. As a part of Christ's church, each person — no matter their lot in life, their background, their advantages or disadvantages, abilities or disabilities — has a gift to offer to the Body of Christ. Remind us all that everyone is a gift to the church and has something to contribute to the common good.

We thank you and bless you for the church in all its broken beauty, lost and yet found, wounded and yet healed, poor and yet rich, redeemed and yet still being redeemed. Take this misshaped clay of the church and mold us into a divine sculpture of your making, even into the image of Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Leo Hartshorn is former Minister of Peace and Justice with the Mennonite Mission Network and staff for the Peace and Justice Support Network. For almost 40 years, he provided pastoral leadership for congregations in California, Texas, Pennsylvania and Oregon. Hartshorn earned his doctorate in ministry, resulting in a published book, "Interpretation and Preaching as Communal And Dialogical Practices: An Anabaptist Perspective," Edwin Mellen Press (2006) and was adjunct professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.