



Prepared by the MWC Regional Representatives for 19 January 2025, or at any time convenient for your congregation in 2025.

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

Worship Resources

Theme and texts

a. Theme:
The Courage to Love

b. Why this theme was chosen:

The first baptisms in the Anabaptist tradition took place in secret in Zurich, Switzerland, on 21 January 1525. A small group of Jesus-followers acted together with courage on their shared understanding of Scripture and the church, different from their political and religious context. Today there are churches all over the world in the Anabaptist tradition, acting together with courage to love each other, different from our political and religious contexts that too often pull us apart.

c. Biblical text options:

Old Testament:
Genesis 50:15-21
Psalms: Psalm 133
Gospel:
Luke 7:36-50
New Testament:
1 John 4:7-21

d. Relationship between the theme and biblical texts:

- Joseph forgave his brothers and took care of them.
- How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
- The woman courageously showed her love for Jesus, in ways that were beyond acceptability.
- Let us love one another, for love comes from God.

2

Prayer requests

Prayer requests from MWC

- We give thanks for your creation with all of its beauty and diversity on earth and in the heavens.
- Lord, we seek your forgiveness for our failures to live up to your plan and purpose. We seek your courage and power to follow Jesus's teachings to cooperate with you in restoration of your kingdom in a world that is broken and messy.
- Together we pray that we may recognize and affirm the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of our sisters and brothers of our various national church conferences, and live into the unity we have been given in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Pray that God's love will flow through the churches to the youth in their communities, reaching them with the message of Jesus. Pray for the churches in some parts of the world who have the challenges of many children and young adults.
- Pray for the churches in some parts of the world who face the challenges of many aging members.
- Pray for the MWC event on 29 May 2025 in Zurich, to commemorate 500 years of Anabaptism, in the context of renewed relationships with the Reformed Church (WCRC).
- Pray for the current needs in the MWC family as expressed on the MWC prayers page: mwc-cmm.org/en/prayers

3

Song suggestions

Songs from MWC 2022 International Songbook

Africa #22

Somlandela / We will follow / Je te suivrai / Seguiremos

Asia: #11

Kirisuto no heiwa / May the Peace of Christ

OR #12

Dalam Yesus kita bersaudara / In Jesus Christ We are One Family

Europe # (1990)

[Vrede dragen in Gods naam / We are people of God's peace, words by Menno Simons, Worship Together #677](#)

Latin America: #30

Cantai ao Senhor / Oh Sing to the Lord / Cantad al Senor / Pujilah Tuhan

North America: #36

True Evangelical Faith / Le fe de Cristo / Wahrer Glaube wird / Iman Injili Yang Murni

Song videos available online at

mwc-cmm.org/awfs.

Please check your congregation's copyright protocols before using these songs in public gatherings.



4

Additional resources

In this package (pages 3-13)

- Liturgies and symbols for gathering and benediction
- Sermon
- Commemorating 500 years of Anabaptism with history, liturgy and reconciliation
- Children's activity
- Tithes and offering suggestions
- Celebration ideas



6

Multimedia resources

See mwc-cmm.org/awfs

- Written resources online in English, Español, Français, Deutsch, हिंदी and Português
- Video readings of Scripture texts
- Video sermons in English, Español, Français and Deutsch
- Video testimonies in English, Español, Français, 中文 and Swahili
- Song videos
- Photos
- Celebration map

5

Offering

- MWC invites congregations to take a special offering for our global Anabaptist family on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. One way to do this is to invite every member to contribute the cost of at least one lunch in their own community to support the core ministries and Commissions of MWC and to acknowledge that we are all members together. This is a manageable amount for nearly every MWC member around the world, except in times of drought, flooding and violence.
- Go to [page 8](#) for more ideas to celebrate a special offering time for Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.



First Mennonite Hutchinson KS, USA

BICC Mt Pleasant Harare, Zimbabwe



Youth of GKMI Kudus, Indonesia

The biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas, testimonies and other resources in this package have been prepared by members of MWC from their experience in their local context. The teaching does not necessarily represent an official MWC position.

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📷 Please send your photos and testimonies regarding your celebration to photos@mwc-cmm.org



Commemorating 500 years of Anabaptism

Part A: Origin of Anabaptism in 1525

Part B: Origin of Anabaptists/Mennonites in your own country

Part C: WCRC and MWC Common Statement of Confession, Gratitude, and Commitment

Part D: Responsive reading of gratefulness, based on Psalm 136

This content is provided to give context for Anabaptism@500 years – back then, and today. Please use as much of this content as is relevant for your own context. Please be sure to add in the history of Anabaptism within your own country and how your church came to be today.



Migration map of the Mennonites circa 1525-1970. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Village, Acc. No. 1972.2.1, © John Henry Friesen

Part A: Origin of Anabaptism in 1525

The Anabaptist movement began as part of a renewal movement within the Catholic Church in Europe in the early 16th century. Some of its inspiration comes from the Catholic tradition: the strong sense of discipline and community found in monasticism, for example, the attentiveness to the Holy Spirit that could be found in Catholic mysticism, or the emphasis on following Jesus in daily life in *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas á Kempis. Anabaptism also owes a debt to Martin Luther and the early Reformation movement, particularly Luther’s emphasis on the authority of Scripture and his emphasis on the freedom of the Christian conscience. The movement was shaped by deep social and economic unrest of their time that exploded in the Peasants’ War of 1524-1525.

The Anabaptists themselves, however, would have said that they were simply trying to be faithful followers of the teachings of Jesus and the example of the Early Church.

A moment in 1525 serves as the symbolic beginning of the Anabaptist movement: a small group of Christian reformers gathered for a secret worship service in Zurich, Switzerland. The group was frustrated by the hesitance of their leader, Ulrich Zwingli, to enact the changes to Catholic rituals that they agreed Scripture demanded. In their reading of Scripture, true Christian baptism assumed a conscious commitment to follow Jesus – something no infant could do. So on 21 January 1525, this small group agreed to baptize each other as adults.

Although it would be some time before the full meaning of baptism came into focus, the early Anabaptists understood this act to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit in the gift of God’s grace, a commitment to a life of daily discipleship and membership in a new community of God’s people.

Named by opponents

Members of the movement generally referred to themselves as “Brethren” (*Brüder*) – or later by the more descriptive term “baptism-minded” (*Taufgesinnten*). Their opponents labeled them Anabaptists (= re-baptizers), in part because “rebaptism” was a criminal offense in the Holy Roman Empire, punishable by death. At first, the



group resisted the term “Anabaptist” since in their minds they were not rebaptizing, but rather baptizing correctly for the first time. But over time, the name persisted.

Today, Anabaptist is an accepted English term for all Reformation groups who practiced believers (rather than infant) baptism, and the denominations descended from them such as the Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites.

Identity-forging challenges

Over time, however, a coherent movement emerged. Its identity was forged, in part at least, from the need to respond to several basic challenges.

First, in response to accusations of heresy by religious and political authorities in the first half of the 16th century, Anabaptists were quick to define themselves as faithful, Bible-believing Christians.

Second, militant voices within their number who were ready to impose social and religious change with violence forced Anabaptists to clarify their identity as peaceful, law-abiding, nonviolent Christians whose only weapon was love.

And finally, in the face of spiritualist dissenters who favored an internal religious experience that could avoid theological disputations and go undetected by authorities, Anabaptists were compelled to defend the public and visible nature of the church.

Three streams emerge

Despite the diversity of theology and practice evident in the first generation of Anabaptists, three coherent groups had emerged by the 1540s: the Swiss Brethren in the German-speaking territories; the Hutterites in Moravia; and the Mennonites of the Netherlands and North Germany who were organized around the leadership of Menno Simons. Although these groups differed in important ways, they nonetheless recognized each other as members of the same religious tradition, so that their internal disagreements often took the form of a family quarrel.



— *Excerpted from Stories: How Mennonites Came to Be, by John D. Roth, Herald Press, 2006. Adapted and used with permission.*

Over the next 500 years Anabaptism spread to many different countries around the world, each with their own origin story. Mennonite World Conference began 100 years ago to bring together the many churches from different streams of Anabaptism for fellowship, worship, witness and service.

More reading: Anabaptist World: 2 March 2015, “The Birth of Anabaptism”

anabaptistworld.org/the-birth-of-anabaptism/



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Irma Sulistiyorini

Part B: Origin of Anabaptists/Mennonites in your own country

Please be sure to discuss the history of your own congregation and the development of Anabaptist/Mennonite churches in your own country.

Helpful summaries are available at the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Search a country name to learn about Anabaptist movements in the region.

gameo.org

The Anabaptist wiki also offers articles about Anabaptists in many countries.

[anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Global Anabaptist Wiki](http://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Global_Anabaptist_Wiki)





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J. Nelson Kraybill



Part C: WCRC and MWC:

A common statement of confession, gratitude and commitment

Mennonite World Conference appointed several people to participate in an ongoing ecumenical dialogue with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This is one of the state churches who in the 1500s persecuted the early Anabaptists in Europe.

Together, this group of theologians from WCRC and MWC prepared a shared statement for public delivery on 29 May 2025 in Zurich, Switzerland.



wcrc.eu

The title of the statement is “Restoring Our Family to Wholeness: Seeking a Common Witness.” The statement includes sections on giving thanks and celebrating our common confession of Jesus as Lord; confession and lament; and ends with God’s call to unity and peace. The statement can be found on the MWC website:

mwc-cmm.org/node/5076

Going forward with the WCRC, rather than on “resolving” the historical theological points of difference that have divided us, MWC emphasizes the places around the world where Mennonites and Reformed churches are collaborating in our witness.



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Part D: An MWC liturgy of gratefulness

Based on Psalm 136

It is God's faithfulness and message of salvation through Jesus Christ that we celebrate, as it has been passed down and around through the generations over 500 years, reaching us today.

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.*
Give thanks to the God of gods,
For his steadfast love endures forever.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Who by his understanding created the heavens
and the earth,
Who built the church as Christ's Body here on
earth,
Who renews the church throughout time,
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Who through the witness of the Holy Spirit 500
years ago,
inspired the Radical Reformers with a renewed
vision for following Jesus,
Who brought a deepened understanding of God's
call on our lives,
Grounded in Jesus, the Bible, community
discernment, discipleship and love of enemies,
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Who through the Spirit called witnesses to spread
the Good News all over the world,
Who inspired new congregations to witness to
God's love for all cultures and all lands,
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Who is Lord over our own [name of church] in
[name of country],
Who nourishes and strengthens our own
congregation to live out God's call on our lives,
Grounded in Jesus, the Bible, community
discernment, discipleship, and love of enemies.
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Who works through the global family of faith we
call Mennonite World Conference,
Who is growing a church that transcends
boundaries of race, ethnicity and language,
Who calls us together as a communion (koinonia)
to follow Jesus, live out unity and build peace.
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,
Give thanks to the God of gods,
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For his steadfast love endures forever.

*The refrain "**For his steadfast love endures forever**" could be replaced by "**For God's love never quits**" all the way through the responsive reading.



Tithes and offering ideas

First Mennonite Church Calgary, Alberta, Canada



MWC invites a special offering to be taken for the global Anabaptist church community on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. One way to think about this offering is to invite every member to contribute the value of one lunch in their own community to support the networks and resources of our global Anabaptist church family. Sacrificing one lunch is our humble way of giving thanks to God and supporting the on-going ministry of God through the church.

This gift of **“one lunch”** (the value within one’s own country) **per person, once a year**, is something that most MWC members can do, except in times of famine or violence. People who have more resources can give much more than this, and could be encouraged to do so. Others with more scarce resources could consider giving the monetary value of one item that they would normally include in a meal.

Here are some ideas on how to plan for a special MWC offering in your congregation.

1. Plan for One Lunch offerings to be put into a special basket at the front or in culturally appropriate lunch bags/containers during the worship service as a separate offering from the normal offering.
2. Plan for a shared congregational meal together before or after worship on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.
 - This could be “potluck”, with each family bringing dishes of food to share, with an offering basket for MWC to “pay” for the meal.
 - This could be auctioning off or selling a prepared packed lunch brought by families to the church. These packed lunches are then available for auction or for purchase or donation by anyone to take home, or to eat together after worship.
3. Plan for a time of shared fasting and prayer for the global church during a mealtime before or after worship on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. Include an offering for MWC during that time. This offering would approximate the value of the meal that is not being eaten by the participants in the fast.

Funds that are gathered through this special offering in each congregation can be sent directly to Mennonite World Conference using the various mechanisms shown on our website (mwc-cmm.org/donate).

Or, these funds can be sent to your national church office with a request to pass the funds on to MWC. Clearly mark the offering as designated for Mennonite World Conference and indicate it is an Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday offering.



Children's story and activity

“The Courage to Love” activity

Luke 6:32 says if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

Human beings have the tendency to love those who love them. It is easy to love those who love us or who are good to us. But Jesus teaches us to love those who do not love us.

We need to have the courage to love and accept all kinds of people around us. And this is possible only when we have Jesus in our hearts.

Here is an activity that can be done with children to think about *the courage to love*.

Materials required:

1. Different colours of craft papers, including red and white
2. Pencil or marker
3. Scissors
4. Glue

Steps:

1. Draw and cut a big heart with red coloured craft paper.
2. Draw and cut a cross with white coloured craft paper. The cross should fit inside the heart.
3. Cut small circles from other colours of paper. Draw faces on them with different expressions. *(These circles represent different kinds of people we have around us: some are sad, some happy, some angry.)*
4. Glue the cross inside the heart. *(Represents the presence of Jesus in our hearts.)*
5. Glue the different faces inside the heart.



Photo adapted with Adobe Firefly

This heart picture will help us to understand that we can love and accept different kinds of people in our lives when we have the love of Jesus within us.

— contributed by Amita Siddh, Rajnandgaon
Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church of India



Celebration ideas

1. Participate in person, or join in online on 29 May 2025

On Saturday 29 May 2025, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) will welcome guests from around the world to **The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500**. The day-long celebration commemorates the birth of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich, Switzerland.

Following workshops, concerts, a panel discussion and a self-guided historical walking tour, participants will gather for an ecumenical worship service at the Grossmünster cathedral.

As an act of peacebuilding and a testimony to recent reconciliation, MWC is inviting leaders of world communions (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed) that were once sharply at odds with the Anabaptist movement. All events are within walking distance.

The final worship gathering will be conducted in English and translated into French, Spanish and German. The service at 15:00 UTC will be livestreamed.

2. Host your own local or regional gathering

Celebrate together in a worship service and/or potluck using these worship resources and eating with brothers and sisters. This could be on AWFS on Sunday 19 January 2025, or on 29 May 2025, or whatever timing is convenient in your own context.



Lisa Carr-Pries

3. Create and share artwork and stories

Identify aspects of the Anabaptist message that reach us today. Create your own personal testimonies, sermons, artwork. Share on social media, post in homes or church buildings, etc.

For each of these we give thanks, and at the same time we identify ways we feel called to respond through faithfully sharing and living out the message of God's love here and now.



Karla Braun



Liturgies and symbols for gathering and benediction

On a table at the front, place five candles of different colours for each continent on top of a map of the world (or beside a globe) along with a white candle as the Christ candle in the middle.

At the start of the worship service, name each continent as its candle is lit, acknowledging brothers and sisters in each continent.

Light the Christ candle last (or first) as the source of light for the church everywhere.

Call to worship

Use this call to worship based on Psalm 133 near the start of the service.

Though we may be inclined to brag,
let us come together with humility.

How good a thing it is when all of God's people live together in unity.

Though we may be tempted to use harsh words,

let us come together with gentleness.

How good a thing it is when all of God's people live together in unity.

Though we may want everything to happen quickly,

let us come together with patience.

How good a thing it is when all of God's people live together in unity.

Though the world around often encourages hate,

let us come together in love.

How good a thing it is when all of God's people live together in unity.

In humility, gentleness, patience, love, and unity,

Let us worship the God who has called us together.

—written by Joanna Harader, a Mennonite pastor in Kansas, USA

Commission

Use this commission & benediction based on 1 John 4:7-21 at the end of the service.

Go now, to love the world and all who inhabit it, because love is from God.

Proclaim God's salvation to every people.

Remain in Jesus Christ, and like plants in a garden, draw your life from God.

And may God, the Creator, tend you and make you flourish;

May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life;

And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

...In the name of Christ. Amen.

—written by Gerald Hildebrand, a Mennonite pastor in Manitoba, Canada

Benediction

Use this call and response from Africa as a benediction at the end of the service.

Leader: God is good

People: All the time.

Leader: All the time

People: God is good.

Leader: All the time

People: God is good.

Leader: God is good

People: All the time.



Sermon

Psalm 133

Introduction

Do you remember any specific smell?

Our sense of smell is one of the most interesting senses we have. Smell can bring pleasant memories of a meal you loved as a child, and unpleasant odours can elicit disgust.

Church unity is like your sense of smell: it fills you with hope and strength when you experience it, or it makes you want to disengage and run away when poorly managed conflicts make it evaporate.

This is what Psalm 133 is all about.

Literary context

Psalm 133 is part of a group of 15 psalms referred to as “songs of ascents”.

The first psalm in the collection, Psalm 120, expresses the pain of discord and hostility while Psalm 133, at the end of the collection, responds to the question asked in Psalm 120: How can we speak about peace in the midst of a society that chooses war?

Historical context

It's possible that the pilgrims who had lived through the exile used the songs of ascent when they would go to Jerusalem to celebrate a major festival. These are brief psalms that, when sung, reinforce beliefs and fundamental values that remind us of oppressive contexts and suffering like that of the Israelites in exile.

A study of the passage

The visible reality of unity

Even though some versions do not translate the first word following the title, *hinneh*, or “look”, is

very significant. The invitation in the text to “look” indicates that the unity of God’s people is not merely something spiritual or something we only enjoy after death. The unity of God’s people is a tangible reality that can be seen and experienced in the here and now.

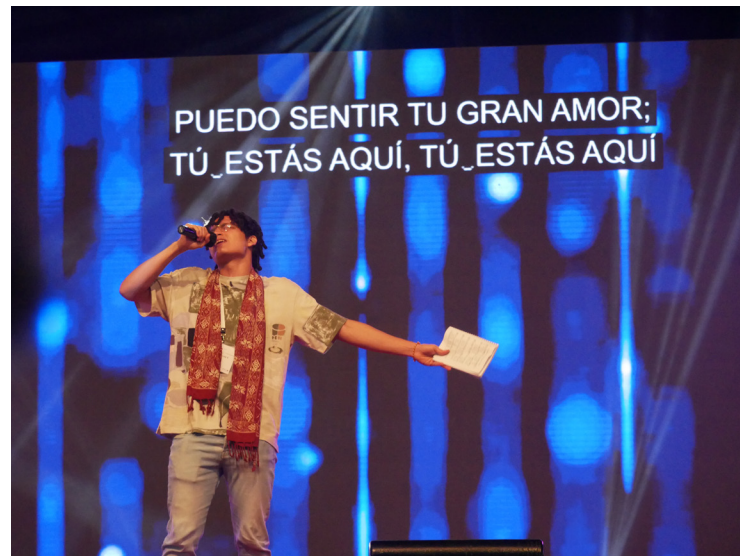
In the second century, Tertullian said, “Look how they love one another”.

The drawing reality of unity

Unity is a blessing that brings more blessings; it is a lengthy and abundant life; it is the aroma that spreads; it is the dew that soaks.

Just as a pleasant smell draws people, the unity of God’s people is something that everyone longs to experience and becomes irresistible when it is found. It is like when you are very hungry and pass by a restaurant that emits the aroma of your favourite dish.

In the same way, when you find unity in the middle of a sea of discord and conflict, you don’t want to let go of it.



Nico Yonatan



The received reality of unity

The passage speaks of oil and dew that descend. The oil flows to the collar of the priest's vestments where the precious stones on his chest symbolize the tribes of Israel. The dew brings coolness and fertility from Mount Hermon to Mount Zion.

This is what characterises the unity of the Israelites: It's given by God and received by **God's** people.

True unity is not built or reached through human agreements about doctrine and practice; it is a gift from God.

Application

Psalms 133 describes the reality of unity without explaining how to receive it in practice. Colossians 3:14 affirms that love makes unity possible. 1 John 4:7-21 explains that love is the only evidence that we know God. Divisions in the body of Christ are like a stench that repels others.

Meanwhile, church unity attracts others through the evidence of a supernatural love that unites disciples in harmony despite their differences.

We pray that the next 500 years in the history of the Anabaptist movement are marked with the love, reconciliation, and the gift of unity that draws those who are weary of a destructive world full of division, nationalism, political polarization and interminable wars.

— *César García is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. Originally from Colombia, he lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, with his wife Sandra Baez.*