



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

Peace and Justice
Support Network



PEACE Sunday 2012

Contributed by

*Pastor Janice Sutter, Kern
Road Mennonite Church,
South Bend, Ind.*

Along with Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Church USA celebrates Peace Sunday the Sunday closest to the International Day of Prayer for Peace, which is Sept. 21. **However, you may use these materials any Sunday that works for your congregation.**

Agreeing and disagreeing in love

Introduction

In this season of election year politics and many divisive issues in faith and culture, we still strive toward unity and maturity as a faith community. Seeking to learn, love, and live God's dream for the world, we'll return to a document that has guided us in years past, the Mennonite Church USA statement, "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love." We'll listen to the guidance of Scriptures, including Ephesians 4:1-6, Matthew 7:1-5, and Romans 14:10-13.

Theme verse

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4-5

Sermon ideas

Idea 1

Scripture: *Matthew 7:1-5, Ephesians 4:1-6, portions of Romans 14*

Start with a story about a conflict being resolved in a family.

Years ago, as a hospital chaplain, I remember seeing a dramatic resolution of conflict in a family who had gathered to surround their mother as she lay dying. A conflict had festered between two family members for years, but after years of not seeing each other, they met in a warm embrace with apologies.

I was touched by this scene, and was also aware of how human it was. If you grew up in a family, you know that conflict is a normal part of life.

Tell a story about conflict in the church in the past. (Maybe a humorous one!) Refer to evidence of conflict in church life as we read *The Mennonite* or the *Mennonite World Review*. If you are part of a church, you know that conflict is a normal part of life in the church. (These stories highlight the first point of *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*, which is "Accept conflict. Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our life in the church.")

We know that conflict was also a normal part of life in the early church. Especially in the New Testament letters, we find all kinds of advice and wisdom about how to work with conflict in a healthy and Christ-like way. Eugene Peterson has an engaging paraphrase of the conflict about church conflicts in Romans 14. We still have differences in our congregations about what to eat and what not to eat!

Talk about the divisiveness of the current political debate. Hopefully, we have variety in the political parties represented in our congregation. As Christians, it is not our practice to put our ultimate hope in any political party, but in Jesus Christ. How can we talk together across party lines? As our nation continues to become so divided along political issues, we as a church need to live and show something different.

Introduce/review the *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love* statement. Invite people to "sign on" to this way of living with difference in their lives.

Idea 2

Scripture: *Matthew 5:21-24, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, Luke 7:36-50*

Review the idea that conflict is a normal part of life with others, in our families and in our congregation. Our challenge is to live with our differences in healthy and Christ-like ways.

This is not a new challenge. There is conflict all over the Bible we read ... because there are human stories all over the Bible we read. Read a variety of excerpts from the New Testament letters written to people in conflict with one another. Check out Peterson's *The Message* paraphrase.

Name a variety of issues in which there is great diversity of viewpoints in your congregation. Here's a list to get you started: use of wealth, lifestyle decisions, alcohol consumption, material possessions, food choices, divorce, homosexuality, racism, patriotism, biblical interpretation, women in ministry, use of technology, political persuasion

As our neighborhoods, our nation, and world communities continue to become so divided on these and other issues, we as a church have a great opportunity to model something different. Jesus calls us to maturity in working with our conflict. This is not the way of our culture, or even of human nature. As in many areas of our life, Jesus calls us beyond our first impulses, to make choices that are healthy for us and our communities.

Matthew 5:21-24. How we resolve our conflict is so important that God wants us to work at reconciliation even before we bring our offerings of time, talent and money to the altar.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29. Here is the invitation to examine oneself before partaking in communion. In our history, we have taken this invitation very seriously as a call to be reconciled with God and our brothers and sisters before we gather at the Lord's Table.

Luke 7:36-50. This story of the sinful woman washing Jesus' feet at Simon's house highlights how Jesus invites Simon to see the woman as he sees her, beyond simple labels and past history. Jesus invites us to be a community that sees and receives others.

Sample worship service

Prelude

Gathering song

"Brethren, we have met to worship,"
Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 8

Call to worship

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 671

Congregational singing

"We worship God the rock,"
Sing the Journey, No. 28
"We are people of God's peace,"
Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 407

Scripture reading

Sermon

Song of response

During the song of response, invite people to come to a display of the Mennonite Church USA *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love* statement and pick up a copy to take home and study. If they are ready, they can sign on as a way to commit to using these principles and practices in their own life.

Offering/Offering song

Congregational prayers

Benediction

Sending song

"He came down,"
Sing the Journey, No. 31

Other song suggestions

"Help us to help each other,"
Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 362
"Jesus calls us here to meet him,"
Sing the Journey, No. 3
"God of the Bible,"
Sing the Journey, No. 27
"All praise to our redeeming Lord,"
Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 21
"We are people of God's peace,"
Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 407
"Jesus, help us live in peace,"
Sing the Journey, No. 52

Idea 3

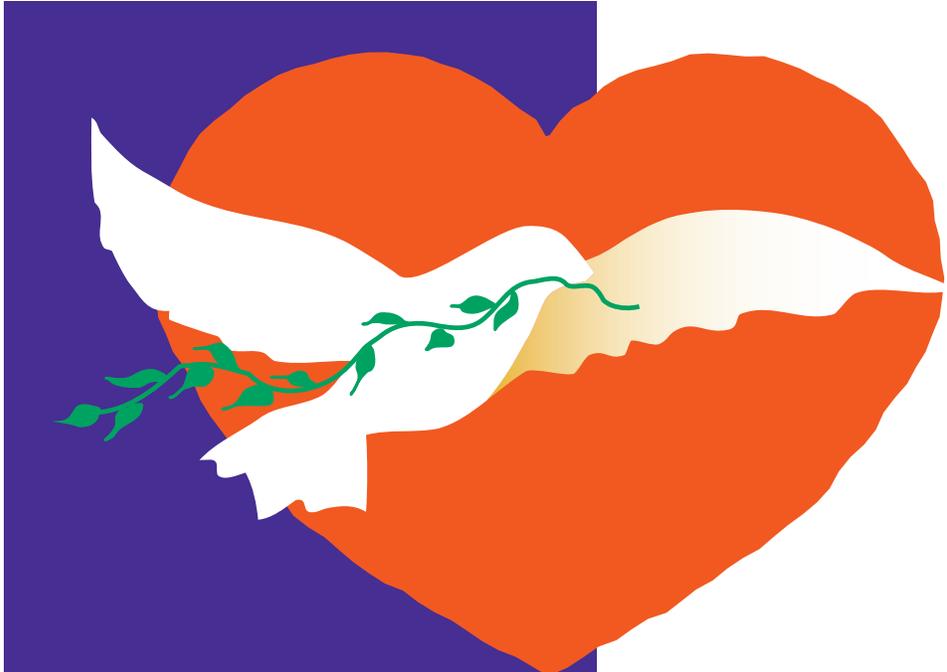
Scripture: Mark 2:13-17, Ephesians 4:1-6

Tell stories of church leaders in the past who worked creatively with conflict. Conflict is part of our history, and working creatively with conflict is part of our history as well. The story of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is a scene of the Pharisees confronting Jesus about eating with sinners. Even as they confront him, Jesus is still talking with the Pharisees. He maintains relationship with them.

Idea for congregational life

Alongside a poster of the Mennonite Church USA statement on *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*, have a large clean sheet of paper with markers available. Invite those who are willing to commit to live by these principles and practices, to sign the paper. Have copies of this statement available for people to take home and study to think about how this can be applied to their daily life. Hang the posters and signatures together in a place where the congregation typically deliberates and makes decisions together. Periodically, offer people in the congregation an opportunity to sign onto this statement if they haven't done so the first round.

▶ Resources like this poster and a bulletin cover idea can be found at our website at:
www.MennoniteMission.net/PeaceSunday



Agreeing and disagreeing in love

Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement

“Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3), as both individual members and the body of Christ, we pledge that we shall:

- IN THOUGHT**
 - Accept conflict
 - Affirm hope
 - Commit to prayer
- IN ACTION**
 - Go to the other
 - In the spirit of humility
 - Be quick to listen
 - Be slow to judge
 - Be willing to negotiate
- IN LIFE**
 - Be steadfast in love
 - Be open to mediation
 - Trust the community
 - Be the Body of Christ



Mennonite Church USA
Peace and Justice Support Network

For peace and justice resources, or to join the Network, visit www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace, or check us out on Facebook. For more information about PJSN, or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material, contact Peace@MennoniteUSA.org. **Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thank you for your support.**

