

Anabaptism at 500 *Tool Kit*

**Ideas and Resources for Commemorating the 500th Anniversary
of Anabaptist Beginnings**



John D. Roth and Mollee Moua

You are part of a living, dynamic tradition!

Five hundred years after the first adult baptisms in Zurich, Switzerland, the Anabaptist movement is alive and well, flourishing in more than eighty countries around the world. In 2025, members of this global movement will join together to “look backward and live forward” into the next five hundred years of our participation in God’s renewing work in the world!

The *Anabaptism at 500 Tool Kit* is intended to help your group participate in this commemorative year. Whether you are looking for resources to plan a Sunday worship service, a Sunday school focus group, a weekend jamboree, or a yearlong series of events, this guide will help ensure that your participation in the 2025 commemorative year is enjoyable and memorable.

This tool kit is ideal for congregations, historical societies, and church-related schools.

All the materials in this text are free; they can easily be downloaded in PDF format and may be reproduced for local distribution.

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of Anabaptist Beginnings

John D. Roth and Mollee Moua



ANABAPTISM
at FIVE HUNDRED



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INTRODUCTION



Welcome!

Five hundred years after the first adult baptisms in Zurich, Switzerland, the Anabaptist movement is alive and well, flourishing in more than eighty countries around the world. In 2025, members of this global movement are invited to “look backward and live forward” into the next five hundred years of our participation in God’s renewing work in the world!

You may be interested in helping your congregation, historical society, or school participate in this once-every-five-hundred-years event—and if you are feeling overwhelmed, you are not alone!

The *Anabaptism at 500 Tool Kit* is intended to help your group sort through various options for participating in the commemorative year at whatever level seems appropriate for your time and resources. Whether you are looking to plan a Sunday service, a special option during a Sunday school hour, a weekend jamboree, or a year-long series of events, we hope that this guide will help make your participation in the 2025 commemorative year enjoyable and memorable. Above all, we hope that the events you plan will inspire all participants—and especially younger generations—to see themselves as part of a living, dynamic tradition.

All the materials in this text are also available online at bit.ly/Ana500TK1. Many of the resources can be easily downloaded in PDF format and can be reproduced for local distribution.



1

Ideas for Organizing Anabaptism at 500 Events

Groups that observe anniversaries or commemorative events know that they take time to plan. Since many groups will give special attention to the month of January—or even to January 21, the date of the adult baptisms in Zurich that marked the symbolic beginning of the Anabaptist movement—planning will likely need to begin already in 2024. But even if your time is limited, there are plenty of options to consider for commemorative opportunities anytime during the five hundredth anniversary year.

Here is a checklist of tasks, ideas, and questions to get you started.

- 1. Identify the core leaders** who will carry the task forward. What is the scope of your event—congregational or regional? What areas of your congregation’s or organization’s life will be included? Worship and music, learning and teaching, service and public witness, hospitality and welcome are some areas to consider.
- 2. Define the goals and outcomes** for the commemoration in your setting. Reflect on why this anniversary matters to your group and what you hope to achieve. Set realistic expectations, but allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you to dream about the future. Assess your capacities, looking for ways that this observance could enhance your existing mission and ministry rather than distract from it.
- 3. Who will be included in the planning group?** Anabaptism at 500 is about looking back *and* living forward. Be sure to involve people of all ages, especially youth and young adults, in the planning process, since they will be the ones to carry the gifts of the Anabaptist tradition forward into the next five hundred years. Think of people who have deep roots in the Anabaptist faith and those who are new to this expression of Christianity. Consider including one or more individuals from a neighboring denomination. This commemoration belongs to the whole Christian church, not just to Anabaptists.
- 4. Review the resources available**, including the ones provided in this tool kit (be sure to also note all the online resources MennoMedia has posted at AnabaptismAt500.com).
- 5. Identify the structure and time frame** for your event or series of events: Will it be focused in January? Will you weave it into a Lent or Advent series? Will it be part of your Sunday school curriculum or your summer VBS program? Will you make it the focus of a four-, six-, or eight-week worship series in the spring or fall? Consider



organizing multiple ways to commemorate this special occasion. Here is an option for a year-long series:

A year of celebrating five hundred years of Anabaptism

Sunday, January 19, 2025—Special Anabaptism at 500 worship service commemorating the first baptisms on January 21, 1525, and celebrating the 2025 release of the *Anabaptist Community Bible*.

January 2025—Bible study using the *Anabaptist Community Bible* (see “Integrating the *Anabaptist Community Bible* into Commemorative Events,” [p. 12](#)).

February 2025—Anabaptism at 500 worship series (see “Services of Renewal: A Four-Part Worship Series,” [p. 20](#), or “Integrating Art and Worship,” [p. 44](#)).

Summer 2025—Summer reading group using the *Drawing Near* or *Footsteps of Faith* devotionals.

Fall 2025—Anabaptism at 500 intergenerational event (see “Resources for Intergenerational Events,” [p. 72](#)).

6. Sketch out ideas for specific events once you’ve decided on the context for your commemoration events. As you do so, consider the following categories:

a. Bible Study (using the *Anabaptist Community Bible* or other Anabaptism at 500 resources)

- Consider replicating the Bible study process used for the *Anabaptist Community Bible* (see “Reading Scripture Together in the Anabaptist Tradition,” [p. 14](#)).
- The *Anabaptist Community Bible* (MennoMedia, 2025) includes seven essays on biblical interpretation in the Anabaptist tradition. Build a seven- or fourteen-week Sunday school series around these essays as a way of reflecting together on your understanding.
- *Drawing Near: A Devotional Journey with Art, Poetry, and Reflection* (Herald Press, 2025) features all forty of the distinctive linocut-style images included in the *Anabaptist Community Bible*, pairing each image with the relevant scripture passage, an original poem by an Anabaptist poet, and several reflection questions. The devotional offers a great framework for Bible study, either individually or in a group setting.
- *Footsteps of Faith: A Global Anabaptist Devotional* (Herald Press, 2025) follows the life of Jesus—from birth to resurrection—through thirty devotional reflections written by leaders in the global Anabaptist church. These texts could structure a Bible study that highlights the Christ-centered emphasis of the Anabaptist movement while also calling attention to the cultural diversity and vitality of the Anabaptist church around the world today.



b. Worship

- Worship services—Review the worship materials that appear in this tool kit ([pp. 20–43](#); also available in the Winter 2025–25 issue of *Leader* magazine, MennoMedia.org/Leader). Adapt these worship suggestions to best fit your context.
- Music—How will music enliven your observance? Consider planning a hymn sing or songfest that begins with music from the Catholic tradition, includes a hymn by Reformation leaders Martin Luther or Ulrich Zwingli, and then follows the history of the Anabaptist movement from the sixteenth century to the present. Offer brief words of explanation for each song.
- Artwork—What images in the Bible are you drawn to? How do they influence your scripture reading? The *Anabaptist Community Bible* includes forty linocut-style artworks that may be incorporated in events and worship services.
- Readers theater—This tool kit includes a mini-drama excerpted from a larger resource of two dozen short readers theater sketches. These dramas, drawn from primary sources, capture some element of Anabaptist faith and belief. Consider incorporating one or more of these dramas into your worship service for a set period (four Sundays? a quarter? one Sunday a month?). The dramas are ideal for incorporating the gifts of young people into your service.
- Themes to consider (for worship, small groups, Sunday school, or public events):
 - *Remembering Our Baptism*: What rituals or structured sharing could help your members remember the significance of their baptism?
 - *Renewal*: What are key moments of renewal or transformation in your congregation’s history?
 - *The Global Anabaptist Church*: What connections does your congregation have with the global Anabaptist church?
 - *Our Congregation in the Anabaptist Stream*: What are key moments of change or transformation in your congregation’s history? How have you connected with the larger Anabaptist tradition?
 - *Making Peace with . . .* creation, money, political activism, mission, and so on.
 - *Why I Am (Still) Mennonite/COB/Brethren/Hutterite*: Feature a series of short personal testimonies in which members reflect on why they continue to identify with this five-hundred-year-old tradition
 - *Reimagining the Future of . . .* Sunday school; your building; the sermon; baptism preparation; your cemetery; and so on.



c. Learning from the Past

- This tool kit includes a selection of primary source historical documents (pp. 56–68) and a curated list of audiovisual materials related to the story of Anabaptist beginnings (pp. 76–77). Select several of these resources (or design your own) that could be explored with adults and youth in your setting.
- How will the stories and insights from the Anabaptist tradition become a part of your regular catechism for young people and newcomers who are preparing for baptism or church membership?
- How will your children experience the reality of God’s love through the stories of key people and events in the Anabaptist narrative?
- Retell key stories from Anabaptist history in ways that connect with the formative stories of your congregation or group. What has changed since the sixteenth century? What themes persist? How are past, present, and future connected in your journey of faith? How can you tell these stories in ways that include children, youth, young adults, and older folks?

d. Looking to the Future

- For every event that you plan, consider how the various components might sound to a visitor or to someone who is still new to your congregation or group. How might you incorporate an acknowledgment of visitors into every program so that they can consider themselves full participants in the event?
- Anabaptists in North America have often been identified with certain cultural markers, from shoofly pie and *verenika* to German dialects to devotional head coverings to horses and buggies. Hospitality can certainly include an element of fun and local tradition. But consider how to also lift up a wide welcome of God’s love and mercy that transcends narrow—and sometimes outdated—cultural characteristics in order to embrace the whole world and its peoples.
- In every event, take note of the reality of cultural diversity among Anabaptists today, not only in the global church but also in North America. Be attentive to the assumptions that show up in the photos, visual images, and artwork that accompany your events.
- Consider integrating a partnership with Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service / Brethren Disaster Ministries, Mennonite Mission Network or another mission outreach, or a local service agency into your commemorative events. How can you give a tangible expression to the themes of discipleship, compassion, and service that have been central to the Anabaptist story from the beginning?
- In recent decades, representatives of the Anabaptist tradition have engaged in significant ecumenical conversations with Catholic, Lutheran, and



Reformed churches (as well as Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, and other groups). A reconciliation service with representatives of the Lutheran World Federation in 2010 marked an especially meaningful moment of forgiveness, along with a commitment by both Lutherans and Anabaptists to tell the history of the sixteenth-century conflicts differently in light of this service of reconciliation. In your Anabaptism at 500 commemorations, consider organizing a Sunday school series or an ecumenical worship service with guests from neighboring denominations. (For documents and context about these ecumenical conversations, see bit.ly/Ana500TK2.)

- Prepare to communicate effectively with neighbors, community leaders, and the media about the larger vision behind the Anabaptism at 500 commemorations. Be ready to respond succinctly, but thoughtfully, to basic questions such as, “Who are the Mennonites / Church of the Brethren / Brethren in Christ / Hutterites (and so on)?” “What’s your story?” “How is your church relevant to your community today?”
- Anabaptists sometimes tend to be slow to call attention to their activities. Push back on that impulse by reaching out to local media to invite coverage of your event in newspapers or on TV or social media. These events can be a form of witness in your community—don’t hide your light under a bushel!



BIBLE STUDY

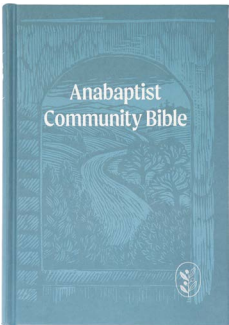


2

Integrating the *Anabaptist Community Bible* into Commemorative Events

Rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, the Anabaptist Community Bible is an invitation to a renewed encounter with Scripture as a living text that has the power to transform our lives.

The Anabaptist movement emerged in the sixteenth-century when a group of young people, gathered around Scripture, resolved to live out the teachings of Jesus with renewed commitment. Five hundred years later, the Bible continues to convict, encourage, and transform faith communities in the Anabaptist tradition.



The *Anabaptist Community Bible*, released in January 2025, represents an entirely new type of study Bible. Not only does it offer the insights of more than sixty Anabaptist biblical scholars, but it also engages readers with biblical commentary written by early Anabaptists and offers insights and questions from nearly six hundred lay Bible study groups in Anabaptist faith communities across North America and fifteen additional countries. The *Anabaptist Community Bible* is further supplemented with seven essays on Anabaptist ways of interpreting Scripture and forty original art works illustrating key stories or biblical passages. (The Bible is available for purchase at bit.ly/AnaCommBible).

At a time when the Bible can seem like a source of conflict—or, for others, as an ancient and irrelevant text—the *Anabaptist Community Bible* invites readers to engage in active, open conversation with each other and the text, in the confidence that the Word will come alive whenever earnest readers are attentive to the Holy Spirit.

As you plan your 2025 commemorative events, consider drawing on the resources of the *Anabaptist Community Bible*. Here are two ideas:

1. The *Anabaptist Community Bible* includes seven essays on biblical interpretation in the Anabaptist tradition (essays start on p. 1537 in the study Bible).
 - “Reading Scripture with Jesus: What Does It Mean to Practice a Christocentric Hermeneutic?”
 - “Forming the Biblical Canon: How Did the Writings between the Bible’s Covers Get There?”
 - “Anabaptists and the Apocrypha: ‘Useful and Good to Read’”



Reading Scripture Together in the Anabaptist Tradition

The goals of Scripture study include growing in the grace and knowledge of God and Jesus (2 Peter 3:18); taking on the righteous character of Jesus (2 Timothy 3:16); and being equipped to teach others (2 Timothy 2:15). In essence, the goal of reading Scripture is to embody Scripture, not just individually but as part of a Christian community.

—Dennis R. Edwards, *What Is the Bible and How Do We Understand It?*

This guide reproduces much of the information and resources used in the Bible study sessions that contributed to the Community Reflection notes for the *Anabaptist Community Bible*. We invite you to modify this approach to best suit your circumstances.

Reading Scripture as a Community

Anabaptists teach that the Bible is accessible to all believers but also that Scripture is best understood when it is read and interpreted in the context of a community committed to following in the way of Jesus.¹ Studying the Bible in a group allows us to learn from one another—blind spots in our thinking can be corrected, other perspectives lend new insights into the text, and fellow believers can challenge us to grow in our faith. The Holy Spirit often helps to illuminate the words of Scripture when believers gather together around God’s Word.

Hebrews 12:1 speaks of “a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us.” Reading the Bible as a community means engaging this cloud of witnesses via three key practices:

Include ancient and contemporary believers. Many have studied the Bible before us and can provide valuable insights. The history, experience, and knowledge of the deeper Christian tradition and of the Anabaptist tradition helpfully inform our understanding of Scripture.

Include those who are formally trained and those who are not. Those who are trained in the biblical languages or who have devoted time to intense study of the biblical context or Christian theology can helpfully illuminate our understanding of Scripture. But ordinary people, drawing on their experience and intellect, can also bring wisdom and insights to the biblical text. The Holy Spirit empowers all believers to interpret and understand the Scriptures. Allowing for all voices helps us gain a fuller picture of who God is.

Center those who have historically been marginalized or ignored. The Bible was written by and to people who

were marginalized. Including voices that have typically been ignored or pushed to the side can provide us with a clearer understanding of the Bible and shape our responses accordingly.

Reading Scripture with Jesus at the Center

Anabaptists believe that Jesus is the center of our faith and the ultimate example of how we should live. This basic principle is crucial to our interpretation of Scripture. We read the Bible through the lens of the life, death, resurrection, teaching, and reign of Jesus. A Jesus-centered reading of Scripture not only pays attention to the historical and literary contexts of particular verses; it also involves the overarching story of the Bible with a focus on the way Jesus taught and acted. As the Old Testament points forward to Jesus, so the New Testament directs all attention to him.

Jesus, for example, knew the Psalms intimately; it was the prayer book of the Jewish people. When reading Psalms, one could ask, “When might Jesus have prayed this psalm? With whom or for whom did Jesus pray this psalm?” In Mark 14:26, we read that at the end of their final meal together, Jesus and his disciples sang a psalm together, likely Psalm 118. How does the context of the Last Supper—and the events that were soon to follow—enrich our understanding of Psalm 118?

Spirit-Led Interpretation and Transformation

Anabaptists have taught that as we read Scripture together, the Holy Spirit guides our interpretation and convicts us to apply what we have learned to our daily lives. Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit when reading Scripture should lead and empower us to be transformed in the way of Jesus. The truths of Scripture are meant to be *embodied* as a community, made up of disciples who strive to live together in love. When different interpretations arise regarding Scripture, we allow space for one another to be heard, ready to value love and grace over our need to be right.

¹ This and the following three sections are adapted, with permission, from Dennis R. Edwards, *What Is the Bible and How Do We Understand It?* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2019). See esp. chs. 3, 5, and 6.

A Basic Strategy for Studying the Bible

These five guidelines are not exclusive or exhaustive, but they can help you get off to a great start in your Bible study.

Be a humble, prayerful, collegial learner. Individual study and being personally invested in the prayerful reading of Scripture can be transformative. Bring what you are observing during your own reading into a group context. Be willing to be shaped and corrected by group discussion, as well as by other interpersonal interactions. Expect the Holy Spirit to communicate in some way through the group experience. Keep in mind that being collegial is paying attention to how others have understood particular passages. Read ancient as well as contemporary commentary on Scripture, being careful to include the voices of women and others on the margins of society.

Pay attention to the genre of a particular biblical passage. Different genres can affect our understanding of how a text operates. The Bible contains narratives, poems, parables, letters, and a variety of other literary genres that are often connected to oral forms. Consider this poetic passage from Isaiah 55:12: “Yes, you will go out with celebration, and you will be brought back in peace. Even the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you; all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” Mountains and hills do not possess vocal cords, and trees do not have hands. Those who claim to take the Bible literally have a challenge with this verse and others like it. Respecting that the verse is poetic means letting the images speak to us in addition to the words. Poetry, perhaps more than any other genre, intends to stimulate our emotions and imaginations, not just convey information.

Respect context. It is important to respect both the literary and historical context of the passage. The literary context is how a particular passage fits into the entire book. The historical context informs us about the historical and cultural situation when the passages were written. It is helpful to consult a few of the many scholarly resources (e.g., the Believers Church Bible Commentary series or the introductions in the *Anabaptist Community Bible*) that shed light on literary and historical contexts.

Consider how your contemporary situation might mirror the situation in the scripture text. For example, many stories in the Gospels reference peasants in an agrarian society, whereas many readers in the modern West are more likely to be urban dwellers. We’ve never been responsible for sheep, but when we read

in Matthew 9:36 that “when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” we can appreciate the point. We’ve encountered beleaguered and rudderless people in our urban or other contexts. We understand that our disposition toward “harassed and helpless” people must be one not of judgment but of compassion.

Ask questions of the text that keep the bigger story, as well as your place in that story, in mind. Here are some good questions to ask as you read:

What might the passage say about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

What might the passage say about people?

How might the passage be inviting us to be more like Jesus in the way we think or behave?

Suggested Group Format

There are many ways to approach Bible study. For the *Anabaptist Community Bible* project, we suggested that groups commit to the following steps during the week before a group meeting:

- a. Read the text carefully several times.
- b. Review the five discussion prompts (see next section).
- c. Read the text again with these questions in mind.
- d. Take some time to write down your responses—comments, insights, questions, applications—to each of the discussion prompts, linking your comments to a specific verse or verses. You can do this directly on paper, or your group leader may suggest using a shared electronic file so you can also see the responses of others in your group.
- e. Come to the Bible study ready to listen, to share, and to be transformed.

3, 4, 5: Three Scriptures; Four Sessions; Five Prompts

For the study groups that contributed notes for the *Anabaptist Community Bible*, we proposed a 3, 4, 5 rubric.

- Select a cluster of 3 biblical passages.
The 365-Day Bible Reading Plan included in the *Anabaptist Community Bible* divides Scripture into 365 clusters, each listing a passage from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Psalms/Proverbs. Select one of these units (three passages) for your focus.

- Commit to meeting *4 times* as a Bible study group.
The first session will introduce you to the study and clarify the process. In preparation for this meeting, it may be helpful to read this guide and reflect on it together as a group, following the structure suggested in session 1. Then plan to meet at least three more times (usually for an hour or an hour and a half), one time each for each of the three passages you have selected.
- Use *5 prompts* to guide your Bible study.
 1. What does the verse or passage suggest about God?
 2. What might/does Jesus have to say about it?
 3. What does the verse or passage suggest about humans—our possibilities and mistakes?
 4. How do you live differently because of this verse or passage?
 5. What questions remain with you?

At the end of each session, spend some time as a group summarizing some of the key themes of the conversation.

Session 1: Introduction to the Bible Study

1. Read the opening sections of this guide before your first session, jotting down a few notes as you read.
2. Come prepared to talk briefly for a few minutes about a particular Bible, a formative experience with Scripture, or a specific Bible story that has been important to you. If you need a prompt to help you think about this, consider sharing one of the following:
 - A childhood memory of a certain Bible story, and how its meaning has changed for you over time
 - A Bible story or scripture passage that is especially meaningful for you right now
 - A passage from Scripture that you memorized and how it has encouraged or challenged you in your faith walk
3. Reflect together on the essays included in the *Anabaptist Community Bible*, especially “Reading Scripture with Jesus” and “Early Anabaptist Understandings of Scripture.” Is there anything new or surprising here? What can you affirm? What do you see as a potential challenge in approaching Scripture in this way?
4. Review the proposed structure for sessions 2–4.
5. Close with prayer.

Sessions 2–4: Reading Scripture Together

Preparation for Bible study

Each session will focus on one of the three passages of Scripture you have selected. As you read in preparation for the Bible study, reflect on the larger context of the passage you will be discussing, drawing on other resources (such as the biblical book introductions in the *Anabaptist Community Bible*) as appropriate. Then take some notes on the five prompts (listed in the column at left).

Reading Scripture in community

1. Start with a welcome and a prayer. You might consider using this prayer as an opening for each session:

Living God,
by the power of your Spirit,
help us to hear your holy word,
that we may truly understand;
that, understanding, we may believe;
and believing, we may follow
in faithfulness and obedience,
seeking your honor and glory in
all that we do,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

—*Ulrich Zwingli, sixteenth-century Reformer*

2. Read the assigned scripture passage aloud (either one person or take turns). Allow for some silence after the passage has been read.
3. Take a few minutes to reflect together on the larger context of the passage.
4. Work through each of the five discussion prompts (spend ten to fifteen minutes with each). Note shared insights or questions; where did you have differences? What insights, comments, applications, or questions generated by your group do you think would be helpful for others who read this passage?
5. Remind your group of the assigned text for the next week. At the end of each session, take some time to reflect on the process. What might you do differently at the next session?
6. End with a prayer.

3

Bible Study Resources and Adult Sunday School Curriculum

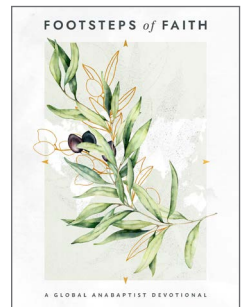
1. *Footsteps of Faith: A Global Anabaptist Devotional*

The Anabaptism at 500 suite of products includes *Footsteps of Faith: A Global Anabaptist Devotional*. This thirty-day devotional focused on the life of Jesus offers perspectives on Scripture from the global Anabaptist church. By focusing on Jesus, readers can renew their commitment and draw inspiration from Jesus' teachings and life.

In *Footsteps of Faith*, thirty writers representing the five Mennonite World Conference regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America) offer reflections anchored in their experiences and cultural and political context. Contributors include global church leaders such as Desalegn Abebe, Cynthia Peacock, Willi Hugo Pérez, Rebeca González Torres, and Doug Klassen.

Each reflection includes a scripture reading, story and reflection on the text, response or call to action, and short written prayer or follow-up. The prompts and prayers encourage readers to move from the text into personal reflection and ultimately to an aspect of transformation. Space is included for readers to write their own prayers or short reflections about transformative experiences.

This format allows for easy use in an adult Sunday school setting or a book club. *Footsteps of Faith* will be available in May 2025 (bit.ly/Ana500TK3).



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Announcing the Kingdom: Repent, for the Kingdom of God Is Near

- 1 The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-20)
- 2 Joseph and Mary's Flight to Egypt with Jesus (Matthew 2:13-15) / Herod Has Children Killed (Matthew 2:16-18)
- 3 Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23)
- 4 Jesus' Temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)
- 5 Jesus Travels to Jerusalem and Cleanses the Temple for the First Time (John 2:13-25)
- 6 Jesus Encounters the Woman at the Well (John 4:1-44)



Jesus Calls the Disciples: Come and Follow Me

- 7 Jesus Begins to Gather Followers (John 1:35–51)
- 8 Jesus Calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11)
- 9 Jesus Teaches the Disciples How to Pray (Matthew 6:9–15; Luke 11:1–13)
- 10 Peter Confesses That Jesus Is the Christ (Matthew 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–20)
- 11 Jesus Sends Out His Disciples to Preach and Heal (Matthew 10:1, 5–42; Mark 6:6b–13; Luke 9:1–6)

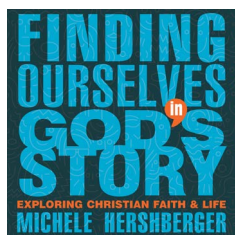
The Kingdom Taught: Seek First the Kingdom and Its Justice

- 12 Jesus Teaches the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)
- 13 Jesus Talks with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)
- 14 Jesus Teaches about Service and Gives Warnings (Matthew 18:1–11; Mark 9:33–50; Luke 9:46–50)
- 15 Jesus Teaches His Disciples about Love (John 15:9–17)



2. We Follow Jesus

We Follow Jesus (available in Spanish as *Seguimos a Jesús*), written by Jacob Lee, is the Winter 2024–25 edition of *Salt & Light* adult Bible study. *We Follow Jesus* is a study of scripture texts foundational to Anabaptist interpretation of the Bible. These studies provide an excellent opportunity for congregations to teach Anabaptist theology and practice in settings that include both youth and adults. Available October 2024 at MennoMedia.org/Salt-Light.



3. Baptism preparation resources or study material for Sunday school or small groups

In simple, clear language, popular teacher and speaker Michele Hershberger offers a wonderful introduction to the basic principles of Christian faith from an Anabaptist perspective in *Finding Ourselves in God's Story: Exploring Christian Faith and Life* (Herald Press, 2025). The book can be used in a group of people considering baptism or church membership, or by people who just want to mull over faith questions on their own before—or even after—they say yes to God's story. Available in May 2025 (bit.ly/Ana500TK4).



WORSHIP



4

Services of Renewal

A Four-Part Worship Series

Congregations may start this four-part series around January 21, 2025, or use it at another time to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of Anabaptism.

Introduction

On January 21, 1525, a small group of Christians secretly gathered in Zurich for a worship service. They renounced their baptism as infants and experienced voluntary baptism as adults, now in the full understanding that this decision implied a transformation of life in the way of Jesus. For many, this decision led to imprisonment, torture, and even death. But this gathering also marked the beginning of the Anabaptist movement that continues today in the form of the Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Brethren, and many other related groups.

In 2025, we invite congregations to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement in a worship series that invites personal and congregational spiritual renewal. These worship services—which draw on story, scripture, song, prayer, reflection, and ritual—invite us to look back as we strive to live wholeheartedly into God’s future. They also guide us toward a renewed groundedness in our community’s sacred stories (a groundedness that includes honest repentance and humility about our failures), a renewed trust in yielding ourselves to seek and do God’s will, and a renewed sense of joy and celebration as siblings around Jesus’ table.

Worship services

Week 1: Renewal through Story invites your congregation toward renewal by highlighting your Anabaptist stories and your identity as an Anabaptist congregation.

Week 2: Renewal through Repentance invites us toward renewal by repenting of our failures and sins as Anabaptist Christians and experiencing the restored joy of the Holy Spirit.

Week 3: Renewal through Trust and Yieldedness invites us toward renewal as we learn anew to trust God’s guidance and yield ourselves to Jesus Christ’s lordship.

Week 4: Renewal at the Lord’s Table invites us into renewal as siblings in Christ around the Lord’s table and as we wash each other’s feet.



Visuals

Most if not all congregations have visual symbols and artwork that depict unique, powerful, and memorable aspects of their congregation’s story—both their history and their relationship with Anabaptist identity. What are those symbols for your congregation? What do they show about who you are and who you are called to be for God’s shalom mission in the world?

For these Anabaptism at 500 renewal worship services, we encourage you to bring these symbols and art pieces to the forefront of congregational awareness. Highlight a new visual image each Sunday and tell the story of its significance. Prominently display the elements that illustrate your congregation’s Anabaptist identity over the four Sundays, adding to the display each week. In this time of “looking back, living forward,” consider inviting a gifted member to create a new symbol for display, signifying congregational renewal and resolve to live wholeheartedly into God’s future.

Music

All songs in each order of worship are found in *Voices Together* (MennoMedia, 2020) unless otherwise indicated. Other sources include *Hymnal: A Worship Book (HWB)* and *Sing the Journey (STJ)*.

Worship resource team

The Anabaptism at 500 renewal worship series was created by Sara Wenger Shenk and Mitch Stutzman in collaboration with the Anabaptism at 500 advisory group.



Week 1: Renewal through Story

Scripture

1 Corinthians 3:11

The Anabaptist faith tradition began as a movement of people dedicated to the Scriptures. As people of the book, Anabaptists draw from the entirety of Scripture to articulate who we are and what we believe. No single text adequately summarizes the Anabaptist experience. This outline offers 1 Corinthians 3:11 as one text for reflection. However, when choosing biblical texts for your worship together, consider the scriptures that serve as carriers of identity for your community. Which passages provide a sense of grounding and meaning for your fellowship? Choose scripture passages for this week that express or expand on your story.

Focus statement

Throughout the Bible, we see many examples of how people used storytelling to shape a collective identity. Understanding our story and acknowledging how we have been formed helps us understand where and who we are. Poet, author, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou said in an interview with the Academy of Achievement, “You can’t really know where you are going until you know where you have been.” How do we hold our stories? How do we share our stories as a community in meaningful ways? Where have we been as an Anabaptist tradition? And how does a deeper awareness of our past help us understand where we are and where we are going?

Call to worship

Voices Together 869

Prayer of invocation

Voices Together 862

Song suggestions

Voices Together

- 4** Christ Is Our Cornerstone (also *HWB 43*; public domain)
- 10** Here in This Place (also *HWB 6*; One License #00031)
- 389** Together (One License #VT389)
- 435** Blessed Assurance (also *HWB 332*; public domain)
- 797** We Are People of God’s Peace (also *HWB 407*)

Other songs

- The Same Love (CCLI #6180933)
- Holy Forever (CCLI #7201044)
- Somos el pueblo de Dios (CCLI #4143745)

Choral anthem

- True Christian Faith by Mike Janzen (available on YouTube)



Children's time

Supplies: An assortment of labels, a can of food with the label removed; a can opener; the word *Anabaptist* written in big letters

Display the labels and talk about how we see signs and labels every day. They help us make sense of the world. Sometimes the labels we put on people can be harmful and can hurt people. Labels can create boundaries and name who is in and who is out. Sometimes labels can be good, helping us understand something more clearly.

Hold up the can missing its label and share: "I have this can; it doesn't have a label. What do you think is inside? If I offered you this can, would you agree to eat it before you knew what was inside? This can might contain a green vegetable (peas, green beans, spinach). Or maybe fruit (peaches, pears; maybe it's pie filling). It may be meat (chicken, beef). It may be soup. Or it could be dog food. Without the label, we don't really know what is in this can."

The church we are a part of is an Anabaptist church. "Anabaptist" is a label (*hold up the word*). This label teaches us something about what we believe and helps us describe who we believe God is and who we believe we should be in response to God. Anabaptism is a label that carries meaning for our church.

Open the can and reveal the contents. Give examples of how Anabaptist values are lived out in your congregation. These could be something related to a community mindset, a Jesus-centered understanding of the Bible, or the work that the church is engaged in to pursue peace and reconciliation.

Prayer: God, thank you for bringing us together so we can learn how to follow you. Thank you for the gift of our minds and the ability to learn. Thank you for the ways you are with us and work through us. Amen.

Sermon ideas

There are countless ways to explore storytelling in corporate worship. What follows are various data points and historical markers that can be launching points for a teaching time during the worship service. Use what feels helpful in your preparation and leave behind what does not feel genuine or helpful in the life of your community.

The Barna Group has been tracking data on Christians and churches (mainly in the United States) for years now. In surveys where people are asked about their religious affiliation, more and more individuals are resisting the traditional labels. A growing number of people say they are spiritual but no longer religious. Some people say, "I love Jesus but not the church." There is a rebellion against these church labels.

Some congregations choose to change their name because they resonate with a different label and find a different carrier of identity to reflect more accurately who they feel called to be. Labels can be helpful so long as we understand what the labels mean. Many denominational streams resonate with the label "Anabaptist." But what is Anabaptism? What does that label mean? Where did the movement start and why? What does it mean now and where is it going? What is the history of your congregation and its point of connection with Anabaptism? Why is your congregation Anabaptist?



Historical survey

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a professor and priest, wrote ninety-five theses and posted them on the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany.

These theses—the document produced by this priest, theologian, and educator—were a direct response to what was happening in the Roman Catholic Church, a church that had become one with the state, using its power and influence to exploit the poor and leverage its political influence to advantage its leaders.

Luther’s act of nailing this document to the door was a tipping point. Unrest was happening in the church. Pent-up energy from the people swirled around what was happening in the institutional church. Luther provided the spark that ignited the powder keg. This action jump-started what we know of as the Protestant Reformation, a breaking away from Roman Catholicism. It reformed of how communities of faith and the members of those communities related to the state, the church, each other, and God.

In 1522, Ulrich Zwingli began preaching at the Grossmünster church in Zurich, Switzerland, about reforming various Catholic traditions. Most notably, he challenged the practice of infant baptism. Zwingli agreed with other reformer voices that baptism should be a believer’s choice, made when a person is of an age to make the active choice to follow the teachings of Scripture.

Zwingli found other voices in the community who also wanted to see reform in the church. They wanted to see a church more aligned with what they were reading in the New Testament. They gathered to read Scripture, study, and share ideas.

On January 21, 1525, a group of radical reformers, including Georg Blaurock, Conrad Grebel, and Felix Manz, met in a home a block away from the Grossmünster church. They read the Bible and prayed together. Through their reading of Scripture, these reformers concluded that the baptism they had received as infants was no baptism at all. After praying, Conrad Grebel asked Georg Blaurock to baptize him. Blaurock baptized Grebel, who in return baptized Blaurock, who then baptized the others who were present. Anabaptism was born.

Anabaptism (meaning “rebaptism,” since the prefix *ana-* means “again”) was an act of sedition. The label was given to the group. It was not a label these early reformers chose or particularly cared for. The early Anabaptists did not think that they were being rebaptized, since they had concluded that the baptism received at birth was not a baptism at all.

The Anabaptist movement spread across the region, reaching a Catholic priest in the Netherlands named Menno Simons. Menno latched on to this new way of thinking and began preaching and teaching Anabaptist values. He became influential in the promotion and continued spread of the Anabaptist movement. He wrote this about baptism: “We are not regenerated because we have been baptized but we are baptized because we have been regenerated by faith and the Word of God. Regeneration is not the result of baptism but baptism the result of regeneration.”¹

Like the term *Anabaptist*, *Mennonite* was not a label chosen by the people themselves but a label assigned to those who subscribed to the teachings of Menno.

One of Menno’s favorite texts for preaching was 1 Corinthians 3:11: “No one can lay any other foundation besides the one that is already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This verse articulates the sentiment of the early Anabaptist movement. No one—not the emperor, not the pope—can lay a foundation other than the one already laid by Christ. Access to that foundation is not found within any of those other constructs, either.

¹ *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John C. Wenger (Herald Press, 1956), 215.



Anabaptist framework

The Anabaptist framework has been articulated in many ways. One recent summary is found in Palmer Becker's book *Anabaptist Essentials*. Becker summarizes the history and theology of the tradition as three core values: Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our life, and reconciliation is the center of our work.²

1. Jesus is the center of our faith. Anabaptists worship a risen Christ. By placing Jesus at the center of our faith, we view the rest of Scripture through the lens of Jesus, the fullest revelation of God.

2. Community is the center of our life. We are committed to each other, both in expressions of forgiveness in community and the reading and interpretation of Scripture. In reading Scripture together, we gain a fuller picture of what God is like. When we encounter life and Scripture together in community, we build a better and fuller picture of what God is like and how God is moving in our midst.

3. Reconciliation is the center of our work. This reconciliation is both personal and social. It is the coming together of evangelism and peacemaking. We seek justice and we seek right relationships with ourselves, others, and our triune God. This creates a theology built around a constant dying to self, not a one-time ticket-to-heaven conversion experience.

These Anabaptist essentials provide a framework for how Anabaptist thought is interacting in the world today. When these pieces are held together, we understand that we are never done with this work, and that this work is highly collaborative—with others in community and with the Spirit—as we strive toward shalom.

Anabaptist theology and practice have much to offer our splintered and fragmented world. Placing Jesus at the center of our faith, community at the center of our life, and reconciliation at the center of our work has the power to transform.

Intergenerational ritual: Storytelling

Provide a place to write or draw in the worship space—perhaps a large whiteboard or prominently displayed pieces of poster board. Invite participants to write a word or phrase or draw a picture that names how they have been shaped by the faith of Anabaptists before them. Participants can write directly on the board or use sticky notes. Consider reading a few examples aloud of how people in the congregation have experienced the faith of Anabaptists before them and how that has affected their faith.

Sending song

For We Are Strangers No More (*Voices Together* 409; also *HWB* 322; One License #VT409M)

Benediction

My siblings, as we end our worship together, let us keep our hearts turned to God. Have the mind of Christ, free to live in love.

Walk the Jesus way to cross dividing lines.

Live in love and peace in our fellowship in Jesus Christ.

² See Palmer Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith* (Herald Press, 2017). Also available in French and Spanish.

May love and understanding be in our hearts and the world.

May peace and friendship be a place of refuge for us amid storms.

May we have the power to speak the truth, proclaim peace, and be compassionate.

May we experience inspiration in the Holy Spirit, blessings and love from God, and peace from Jesus Christ so that we can join in bringing righteousness, justice, and community to the world.

Amen.

Wish each other peace, one to each other: The peace of Christ be with you. And also with you!

—Adapted from Pastor Danang Kristiawan, GITJ Jepara (Gereja Inijili di Tanah Jawa), Jepara, Indonesia, “Liturgies for Gathering and Benediction,” Mennonite World Conference



Week 2: Renewal through Repentance

Repenting of our failures and sins as Anabaptist families of faith

Scriptures

2 Chronicles 7:(8–11) 12–22

Psalm 51:1–3, 10–12

Mark 1:14–15

2 Corinthians 7:8–11

2 Corinthians 12:19b–21

James 4:7–10

Revelation 3:14–22

Focus statement

Anabaptist communities, particularly those that have aspired to live out Anabaptist ideals for generations, have fallen short of who we're called to be as followers of Jesus. Penitence, a primary theme in early Anabaptist spirituality, can correct our tendency as modern Anabaptists to practice discipleship as a form of spiritual and practical mastery rather than as a habit of repentance. A phrase repeated often in early Anabaptist spiritual writings is "Bend the knees of my heart." Being sorry for our sins, witting or unwitting, should motivate a persistent curiosity about our failures to live what we profess, along with creative new ways to amend our lives in solidarity with the body of Christ. The Scriptures tell us repeatedly that when we humble ourselves, seek God's face, and turn from our evil ways, the Holy Spirit ministers to us, and God forgives our sins, renews our communities, and heals our lands.

Preparation

Supplies:

- A sheet of paper for each person, distributed upon their arrival
- Pens, pencils
- A large cross standing on the floor
- Baskets for gathering the papers, placed in front of the cross
- Lit candles around the cross (*optional*)

Call to worship

based on Mark 1:14–15 and 2 Chronicles 7:14 (CEB)

Leader: Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying: "Now is the time."

People: Now is the time?

Leader: "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives."

People: Change our hearts and lives?



Leader: Yes. Repent, and come clean with what you've done wrong and the sin that weighs you down.

People: And this is good news?

Leader: God said, "If my people who belong to me will humbly pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land."

All: *Ah, this is good news! God's kingdom is now. Now is the time to humbly pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways. Then we will be forgiven and our land will be healed.*

Prayer

After sharing the focus statement, scriptures, and intended movement of the service, the worship leader is encouraged to pray. Conclude with everyone joining in the Lord's Prayer. Or simply invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer (*Voices Together* 989; also *HWB* 731).

Song suggestions

Voices Together

- 25 Brethren, We Have Met to Worship (also *HWB* 8; public domain)
- 30 Jesus Calls Us (One License #01471)
- 116 How Great Is Our God (Cuán grande es Dios; CCLI #4348399)
- 547 How Clear Is Our Vocation (*HWB* 541; One License #02337)

Other songs

O Come to the Altar (CCLI #7051511)

Lord, I Need You (CCLI #5925687)

Yo te busco (CCLI #7218365)

Responsive reading

Revelation 3:14-22 (CEB)

Leader: Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

Group A: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot.

Group B: So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. After all, you say, "I'm rich, and I've grown wealthy, and I don't need a thing." You don't realize that you are miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked.

Group A: My advice is that you buy gold from me that has been purified by fire so that you may be rich, and white clothing to wear so that your nakedness won't be shamefully exposed, and ointment to put on your eyes so that you may see.

Group B: I correct and discipline those whom I love. So be earnest and change your hearts and lives.



Group A: I correct and discipline those whom I love. So be earnest and change your hearts and lives.

All: *Look! I'm standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will have dinner with them, and they will have dinner with me. As for those who emerge victorious, I will allow them to sit with me on my throne, just as I emerged victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

Leader: If you can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Pause for a brief time of silent reflection.

Children's time

Supplies: Paper, pencils

Tell a story of a time when you needed to say "I'm sorry." Invite the children to reflect on times when they've needed to say "I'm sorry."

Prayer: Loving God, we want to be your people—kind, truthful, courageous, and obedient—loving you and each other with all that we are. But we often make mistakes. We do and say things that we regret. Thank you that when we honestly say "I'm sorry" to each other and to you, you forgive us and restore our happiness. Thank you. Amen.

As the children return to their seats, offer them paper and pencils to draw a picture of their "I'm sorry" story. This paper can become their contribution when later invited forward to the cross as a part of the corporate ritual.

Song

God, Whose Purpose Is to Kindle (*Voices Together* 152; also *HWB* 135; One License #92193)

Sermon ideas

Our failure to live as devoted followers of Jesus may be different depending on our community context. This worship service invites us to reflect on our context. What are our individual and corporate failures to live out the good news of Jesus with passion and love? How can we acknowledge where we have fallen short? What will help us see what is standing in the way of personally or corporately giving ourselves—heart, body, mind, and soul—to the shalom mission of Jesus in the world?

We call ourselves Anabaptists, but much of our fervor for Christ usually pales in comparison to our spiritual forebears and our siblings among the oppressed who, amid crushing political, religious, and social realities, devoured the Scriptures to know Jesus better and rediscover the purposes of God's kingdom in the world. As they rediscovered Jesus, their lives dramatically changed. They became passionately devoted to Christ, with an intense desire to live like Jesus. Many became outspoken in prayer, song, and public witness—as well as deeds of mercy and care for each other and neighbors.

Many of us in the United States and Canada have become the quiet (and safe) in the land. Too rarely have we recognized that the privileges we enjoy came at the loss of land for Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of other peoples—and the ongoing impoverishment of those who make, grow, or harvest what we enjoy.



What traditional land does your congregation sit on today? Consider researching the history of how Mennonites aided the spread of colonialism in North America. Many of us rarely spend time studying the Scriptures together or alone, worshiping and praying together, or in active service to our neighbors. The abundance of consumer comforts and entertainment options keeps us from loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Repentance invites us to confess our lukewarmness and resolve anew to follow Jesus.

Penitence is the action of feeling sorrow and regret for having done wrong. Repentance is a personal, corporate, and often public action that speaks and shows our sorrow and regret for the wrong we've done. Repentance invites us to consider a change of mind, a change of direction, an acknowledgment of wrongdoing or failure to live as we are called to live, and a resolve to do differently. Repentance is a turning around to reorient our direction toward Jesus—both personally and corporately.

Menno Simons wrote: “‘Those who weep over their past vain lives’ and ‘desire help and aid for their sick souls’ are comforted by Christ, who says to those who weep and desire help: ‘Believe the Gospel, that is, fear not; rejoice and be comforted; I will not punish nor chastise you, but will heal you, comfort you, and give you life.’”³ Scholar Gerald Mast observes that for Menno, more important than penitence was the form of grace given in Jesus Christ, which shaped practices of both penitence and faith:

Menno made it clear that the life, example, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ constituted the time of grace in which we live. This grace was not merely a matter of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross by which humans could be declared righteous before God, as [Martin] Luther taught. The grace of Jesus Christ made visible the kingdom of God and defeated the grip of sin. . . . [It was] a time of awakening—of discovering that the kingdom of God has become visible in Jesus Christ and of becoming conscious of the sin that is repudiated in this kingdom. When this discovery of one's own sinfulness compared with the example of Jesus Christ resulted in repentance and a change of life, such a person became truly penitent, as evidenced by the actions taken to amend one's life. Menno called such a penitence, “a penitence possessed of power and works.”

Reflect on the suggested scriptures to see which one or ones lend themselves to your given context.

- The Chronicles story of the stark choice about ultimate loyalties before us and the vastly different consequences depending on what we choose
- The beautiful, heartfelt penitential Psalm 51
- Mark's clarion call at the beginning of Jesus' ministry
- The apostle Paul's vulnerable pastoral letter that names personal and corporate sins directly
- James's direct, no-holds-barred approach
- Revelation's unsettling word about being lukewarm

³ As cited by Gerald Mast, “Confession: Menno's Penitential Piety and the Foundation of Jesus Christ (1537-39),” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* (January 2024).

A possible conclusion for the sermon is a paraphrase of James 4:7–10, used to transition to the ritual of repentance. James’s voice echoing down the ages assures us that when we come near to God, God will come near to us. James invites us to wash our hands and purify our hearts. Some of us may feel moved to cry out in sorrow, to mourn, and even to weep. When we see our doublemindedness and sin, our laughter becomes mourning and our joy becomes sadness. Yet James the apostle assures us that when we humble ourselves before the Lord, the Lord will lift us up.

Intergenerational ritual: Repentance

Leader: All of us are invited, youth and adults alike, to reflect on and write down the personal or corporate sins we are moved to repent of. As we sing and pray, let us bring these confessions forward to place in baskets at the foot of the cross. Children can also bring the pictures they’ve drawn. Some of us may choose to kneel. Some may choose to name out loud those sins of which we repent. After the service, we will burn these papers in a fire outside. As we prepare for a time of reflection and repentance, let us pray together.

Pray Voices Together 895 or 889 (Psalm 51:1–3, 10–12).

Leader: Let us reflect and write as we sing “Kyrie eleison.”

Sing “Kyrie eleison” (Voices Together 678; also HWB 152) meditatively over and over as people reflect and write.

Leader: Come forward now as you choose. Feel free to kneel by the cross or go to the microphone (*or other method for public sharing*) to name regrets and sorrows out loud, or simply drop your paper in the basket as we sing together.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

- 141** Create in Me a Clean Heart (One License #VT141; also *HWB* 128, different tune)
- 614** Lord, Have Mercy (One License #97600)
- 628** What a Friend We Have in Jesus (also *HWB* 573; public domain)
- 677** Through Our Fragmentary Prayers (also *HWB* 347; One License #198771)
- 693** Khudaya, rahem kar (Have Mercy on Us, Lord; public domain)
- 694** Tears of Suffering (One License #99545T)

Words of assurance

Leader: Look! I’m standing at the door and knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with you, and will have dinner with you, and you will have dinner with me.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

- 606** Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (also *HWB* 582; public domain)
- 608** O Love That Will Not Let Me Go (also *HWB* 577; public domain)

619 In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting (Wehrlos und verlassen sehnt sich; also *HWB* 526; public domain)

631 So nimm denn meine Hände (Take Thou My Hand; also *HWB* 581; public domain)

Benediction

Voices Together 1062—read by a leader or the congregation.



Week 3: Renewal through Trust and Yieldedness

Scriptures

Jeremiah 17:5–10

Proverbs 3:5–8

Matthew 18:1–5

John 15:1–10 (also Isaiah 12:2–6; Isaiah 55)

Focus statement

As the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online notes, *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness) is an attitude of “self-surrender and joyous acceptance of God’s willing” that characterized many early Anabaptists. By yielding their lives to serve the reign of God above all, the early Anabaptists learned to trust Jesus and obey his call to follow him in everything they did. Today, many Anabaptists have lost any understanding or practice of *Gelassenheit*. As we learn again to yield our lives to God and prayerfully immerse ourselves in the story and teachings of Jesus, we too may be renewed in the joy that comes from trusting and obeying God’s call to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly in the Jesus way.

Call to worship

based on Proverbs 3:5–8

Leader: Gathered siblings, may we learn to trust in the Lord with our whole hearts!

People: No more will we rely solely on our intelligence.

All: We will trust in the Lord! With wholehearted resolve, we will employ our minds and our intelligence in the service of the Lord.

Leader: Brothers and sisters, may we come to know the Lord in all our paths;

People: for it is the Lord who will keep our ways straight.

Leader: Trusting the Lord will mean we’re not puffed up with our wisdom.

People: We will trust in the Lord. We will not be puffed up with our rightness or wisdom, but in fear and awe of the Lord, we will turn away from evil.

All: Then our bodies will be healthy, and our bones will be strengthened. Thanks be to God.

Opening prayer

Holy One,

we come to worship today desiring to learn to trust you more fully.

The prophet Isaiah assures us that when we seek you, you can be found.

And when we return to you, you will have mercy on us and generously forgive us.

We come today to bend the knees of our hearts.

We humbly acknowledge that just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways, and your plans higher than our plans.

We come to yield our lives anew to you today, to learn to trust as little children trust a good and loving parent. Amen.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

- 142** God, Grant Us Mercy (One License #VT142TR)
- 143** Come Now, O God (One License #G940206)
- 444** I Sing with Exultation (also *HWB* 438; One License #VT444ALT)
- 570** When We Walk with the Lord (also *HWB* 544; public domain)

Other songs

Raise a Hallelujah (CCLI #7119315)
Firm Foundation (He Won't; CCLI #7188203)
Praise You Anywhere (CCLI # 7219772)

Responsive reading

Jeremiah 17:5-8 (CEB)

Leader: The LORD proclaims:

Cursed are those who trust in mere humans,
who depend on human strength
and turn their hearts from the LORD.

People: They will be like a desert shrub

that doesn't know when relief comes.

**They will live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in a barren land where no one survives.**

Leader: Happy are those who trust in the LORD,
who rely on the LORD.

**People: They will be like trees planted by the streams,
whose roots reach down to the water.**

**They won't fear drought when it comes;
their leaves will remain green.**

**They won't be stressed in the time of drought
or fail to bear fruit.**



Children's time

Supplies: Draw, print, or search for various pictures of traffic signs, including a yield sign; paper and crayons (*optional*)

Display pictures of traffic signs, with the yield sign as the last one. Ask the children what the different signs tell drivers and bikers to do. Explain what the yield sign means, and how the concept of yielding is important to our faith and following Jesus. Include a reference to the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit helps guide us.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for teaching us about yieldedness and for helping us follow Jesus every day, even when it's hard. Help me to be kind and loving to others, to share, and to help those in need. Thank you for being our friend and for always being with us. Amen.

Option: Hand out paper and crayons and invite children to create signs instructing or teaching people about Jesus or their faith.

Sermon ideas

The early Anabaptists had an intense desire to know and do the will of God as they understood it through the life and teachings of Jesus. Their immersion in Scripture grew out of their desire to live faithful lives of discipleship. They believed that God confronts us in and through the Bible as it is read in the community of faith—when that community is genuinely seeking guidance about how to be faithful to the way of Jesus. They were committed to reading the Word of God together with a sense of expectancy that the Holy Spirit would empower them to know and do the will of God.

The word *yield* isn't used much in the Bible, but the concept is found throughout the Scriptures: learning to surrender, give way, relinquish control, submit, or give one's self by devoting one's life to God and Jesus' mission in the world.

A yielded heart knows, loves, trusts, and obeys the One to whom we surrender or entrust our will. We do that as the Holy One becomes more real to us. In yielding, something powerful happens. It's hard to express in words, but the experience of letting go and learning to trust another's power is life-changing.

While there are slight variations in the story of Jesus and the children in Matthew, Luke, and Mark, the core messages in all three gospels are the same: Let the children come to Jesus, do not stop them, for it is to those who humble themselves like a little child that the kingdom of God belongs. Jesus' pointed word that we will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless we become like a child is, frankly, a little terrifying.

Childlike qualities could be described as trust. Complete dependency. Uncomplicated love. Affection. Wide-eyed wonder. Constant learning and experimenting. A playful aliveness to the world. Unsullied by malicious intent, greed, and hateful recriminations. Yes, a child's needs for food, shelter, protection, and guidance are hugely demanding, but a child's trust, affection, and playful inventiveness are a joy to behold.

What might it mean for us to yield, surrender, entrust our lives to Jesus as little children? To learn anew how to let Jesus lead? To resolve anew to follow where Jesus leads? To recognize our inability to save ourselves and trust Jesus to do it in and through us? What daily discipline might we practice to learn childlike trust?

The metaphor of a vine is a Christ-centered biblical image. A vine is deeply rooted yet continually growing and reaching for the sunshine, suggesting an interplay between



tradition and current experience. A vine has many branches that, while remaining connected to the main stem of the vine, reach out in supportive ways to other branches and provide a canopy of shade. A vine goes through dormant phases and must be pruned to enhance its fruitfulness. Its health and fruitfulness are dependent on its being carefully tended. A vine can be a way for understanding yieldedness: As branches, we must cling to, abide in, and draw daily sustenance from the rooted vine. We cannot flourish unless that connection is kept healthy and real through active love and obedience. As Jesus said, “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love” (John 15:10).

Sermon reflections may want to draw on the following points:

- Jeremiah’s stark comparison between the consequences of trusting in mere humans versus trusting in the Lord
- Excerpts from Isaiah 12 or 55 that revel in the joy and celebration that result from deep trust
- The Matthew text about childlike entry into the kingdom
- Jesus’ reflection on what it means to be a branch clinging to the vine

A possible concluding or even central thought could draw from a beloved assertion by the early Anabaptist leader Hans Denck:

No one can truly know Christ
unless they follow after him in daily life,
and no one can follow Christ in daily life
unless they truly know him. (*Voices Together* 928)

Response songs

Voices Together

556 I Bind My Heart This Tide (also *HWB* 411)

797 We Are People of God’s Peace (also *HWB* 407; One License #VT797)

Another song

I Give You My Heart (CCLI #1866132)

Intergenerational time: Remembering or anticipating our baptism ritual

Depending on the size of the group, use multiple basins with fresh water and towels in the front of or around the sanctuary.

Leader: To paraphrase a few of our scriptures: Happy are those who with childlike trust hold on tight to the Lord. When we do, we will be like trees planted by the streams, whose roots reach the water. We will be like branches that, by clinging strongly to the vine, won’t wither in parched places or dry up in the drought. Instead, deeply rooted in the water of life, we will bear sweet fruit for all to



enjoy. (If the sermon focuses on one of the Isaiah passages or another scripture, rewrite this segue to the ritual to align with the sermon focus).

Everyone is invited to come forward to dip their hands, swish their hands, luxuriate their hands in one of these water basins. With childlike abandon, feel free to come alone or with others. Yield your spirit to the Holy Spirit in these moments. As you reach into the water, imagine your roots touching the energy of the Holy Spirit, cleansing and renewing you to come alive in Christ. Some of you may remember your baptism. Some may anticipate baptism. All are invited to come—alone or as two or three together. And join in singing as you're able.

Song suggestions for a small group or the whole congregation

Voices Together

- 306** I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (also *HWB* 439; public domain)
- 443** I Have Decided to Follow Jesus (contact copyright holder for streaming privileges)
- 452** With Water Freely Flowing (contact copyright holder for streaming privileges)
- 550** God Who Touches Earth with Beauty (also *HWB* 511; One License #1012272)
- 555** Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing (also *HWB* 514; public domain)
- 560** Just As I Am, without One Plea (also *HWB* 516; public domain)
- 561** Here's My Life, I Lay It Down (CCLI #4084402)

Other songs

- I Surrender (CCLI #6177317)
- I Speak Jesus (CCLI #7136201)
- Holy Water (CCLI #7136448)

Benediction

Isaiah 55:10–11 (CEB)

Leader: Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky
and don't return there without watering the earth,
making it conceive and yield plants
and providing seed to the sower and food to the eater,
so is my word that comes from my mouth;
it does not return to me empty.
Instead, it does what I want,
and accomplishes what I intend.

Closing songs

Voices Together

- 638** Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (also *HWB* 592; public domain)
- 830** Go, My Children (also *HWB* 433; One License #04342)



Week 4: Renewal at the Lord's Table

Scriptures

Matthew 26:26–30

Mark 14:22–26

Luke 22:14–20

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Focus statement

The Lord's table offers a space to gather, to be fed and nourished, and to renew ourselves both as individual believers and as communities as we remember the ongoing invitation from Jesus. The table of our Lord offers us a space to gather and to be sent from. As we engage in communion and experience renewal at the table, may we be attentive to the continued work that the Holy Spirit is doing among and through us.

The practice of communion carries deep symbolism, and worshiping fellowships hold to different ways of practicing the Lord's Supper together. Engage in a way that feels genuine and respectful of your community's life and practice.

Call to worship

text adapted from "Let the Hungry Come to Me" (Voices Together 459)

Leader: Let the hungry come to the table.

People: Let the poor be fed!

Leader: Let the thirsty come to drink.

People: Share my wine and bread.

Leader: The table is set.

People: Come and eat.

Leader: Drink from the cup freely offered to you.

All: Share the life of God!

Prayer of invocation

Voices Together 854

Song suggestions

Voices Together

467 Taste and See (One License #00155)

477 Seed, Scattered and Sown (One License #67105)

478 I Come with Joy (also *HWB* 459; One License #95155)

Sing the Journey

4 You've Got a Place (public domain)



Other songs

God So Loved (CCLI #7169675)

Jesus Paid It All (CCLI #4689508)

Jesus Messiah (CCLI #5183443)

Children's time

Supplies: An artifact from a family or religious ritual

Share about an artifact or ritual that triggers a memory. It may be a tradition around a holiday, an article of clothing that belonged to a relative that helps you remember them, or maybe a special meal that you always eat on the same holiday. Then invite the children to share things from their lives such as regular celebrations, consistent meals, traditions, and rituals.

Use these moments to pivot into telling the story of the Last Supper. Jesus and his friends were celebrating the Passover. They had grown up celebrating this holiday in special ways. Jesus then used things that were on the table at this celebration to teach the disciples something new about himself. Now we celebrate this meal as a church in a different way. We celebrate it to remember Jesus and to celebrate the community that we have here.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for bringing us together and for giving us ways to remember who you are. Amen.

If children do not partake in communion in your congregation, consider offering them modified elements like gluten-free crackers and sliced grapes as they return to their seats. These elements can become the children's participation as a part of the corporate ritual of communion in the service.

Sermon ideas

Reflection on rituals

The church has certain rites and rituals. Each faith tradition practices them a little bit differently or has different expectations. All have practices and rituals that unite them, ground them, and connect them to the divine. These practices have often been passed along and communicated through creedal statements or confessions.

Anabaptists have often been wary of creeds, which typically do not mention the life and teachings of Jesus. Creeds can be construed as a source of salvation (say these words and that's all you need to do) or a rote belief statement that doesn't carry expectations of living the baptized life. Mennonites have periodically written confessions of faith. Other Anabaptists, such as the Brethren, affirm the New Testament as their creed. Member groups of Mennonite World Conference affirm seven "shared convictions."

The Apostles' Creed was likely drafted sometime in the fifth century. Since that time, it has been used consistently in liturgical practice by many Christian traditions and has been included in Mennonite hymnals. The version of the Apostles' Creed that follows honors the original language. But note how the creed moves immediately from "born of the virgin Mary" to "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Since the life and teachings of Jesus are so crucial to Anabaptist understandings of faith, we also have appended here a slightly revised version (used by permission), created by minister and author David Augsburg, that includes a fuller reference to the life of Jesus. Consider integrating this affirmation of faith along with the "Anabaptist comma" into your commemorative worship services.



Apostles' Creed with the "Anabaptist Comma"

Disciples: I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
God's only Son,
our Lord, who was
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,

*One disciple: [welcomed by shepherds,
greeted by magi,
pursued by Herod,
sheltered in Egypt,
taught by Joseph,
baptized by John,
tempted by Satan,
followed by disciples,
heard by multitudes,
understood by simple,
despised by clergy,
praised by lepers,
hosted by outcasts,
seen by the blind,
touched by the ill,
obeyed by psychotics,
rejected by siblings,
rebuked by Martha,
embraced by Mary,
anointed by a prostitute,
cheered by crowds,
loved by John,
hated by the Powers,
abandoned by all,
grieved in Gethsemane
betrayed by disciple,
denied by Peter,
arrested by Herod,]*

Disciples: suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
on the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,



he is seated on the right hand of the Father,
he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,*
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

**that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

An Anabaptist perspective on communion

Jesus' "last supper" was a Passover seder, usually celebrated by extended Jewish families in their homes. Jesus could have shared the Passover with any number of families or followers. But he chose twelve of his disciples as his guests (which means that they were not with their families for this important family time).

After the meal and during the seder (the remembrance of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt), Jesus totally transformed the meaning of the bread and the cup as signs of the new covenant he was making possible between God and God's people. He gave this revelation to the disciples, who would be responsible for carrying on the movement and building the new community of believers.

The early church understood that participation in communion was for adults who had sealed their commitment to Christ and his church in baptism. Seekers completed a three-year discipling process leading to baptism, and only after being baptized were they permitted to partake in communion. Children, unbelievers, and seekers were ushered out of the service, and those preparing for membership received instruction while the baptized believers took communion. Participants had to understand the faith commitment they were making and the meaning of communion. No unworthy partaking was allowed, and the church took full responsibility for this level of participation.

The early Anabaptists also took communion very seriously. They saw participation in communion as a mark of discipleship, a renewing of their baptismal covenant to follow Jesus in all ways, to turn from sin, and to participate in the life of the church. So baptism first, then communion, was also a foregone conclusion for them.

Remembering Jesus' death and resurrection until he comes again and identifying themselves with the kingdom mission through communion carried the possibility of martyrdom for the early Anabaptists. They also valued the caution and instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 and were very concerned that all members be in right relationship with God and one another before taking communion.

We gather at the Lord's table to be reminded, disturbed, and shaken up. We join together to be fed and nourished, refreshed, and renewed as we continue the journey of faith.

Intergenerational time: Service of communion and love feast

Communion observances vary in congregations. Some Anabaptist congregations celebrate the love feast with a simple meal, footwashing, and communion. What practices feel natural and draw your congregation to a solemn yet joyful celebration? A new



practice might shed light on the understanding of communion's multifaceted meaning and purpose.

Consider offering a space for those (children, youth, and adults) who have not been baptized to receive a prayer of blessing. Another way to invite their participation is to offer grapes and crackers to acknowledge their faith journey and in anticipation of a day when they might seal their commitment to follow Jesus with baptism.

Using grape juice and gluten-free bread is helpful to persons with addictions or dietary restrictions. Be mindful of accessibility for those with disabilities or mobility concerns.

Preparation for Communion (*Voices Together* 938)

Invitation to the Communion Table (*Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* 233)

Words of Institution (*Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* 248 or 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 [*Voices Together* 469])

Song suggestions

Voices Together

473 Halleluya! Pelo tsa rona (Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises!; also *STJ* 88; One License #96980)

476 Eat This Bread (Coman de este pan; also *HWB* 471; One License #891)

480 I Am the Bread of Life (Yo soy el pan de vida; also *HWB* 472; One License #28778)

485 Put Peace into Each Other's Hands (also *STJ* 87; One License #02344)

Another song

Remembrance (The Communion Song; CCLI #5484616)

Footwashing

Footwashing, based on Jesus' example and teaching in John 13, is an important practice in Anabaptism that often accompanies communion. It is a practice of yielding, deepening relationships, and humility and an act of service to one another. Including children and youth in footwashing is a wonderful opportunity to teach them why Jesus wants us to be willing to wash each other's feet.

Consider incorporating this practice into your worship or including a service of confession and footwashing in the week before the communion service. Because of the intimacy experienced in the practice of footwashing and to respect those who are present, it may be appropriate to give more specific instructions about who should pair together. Alternate options might include pouring water over people's hands, offering unscented lotion for individuals with sensory overstimulation to apply by themselves, or making footwashing an option in a specific area that does not make it socially awkward to decline to participate.

Introduction to Footwashing (Voices Together 950)

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples—
a leader unexpectedly kneeling before his followers.

We wash the feet of others
to commit ourselves to follow Jesus' example
of powerfully humble service.

We welcome the washing of our feet



to receive this act of loving service from Jesus
through one another as the body of Christ.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

490 Jesus Took a Towel (*also HWB 449; One License #14127*)

Other songs

All the Room Was Hushed and Still (CCLI #5490167)

The Basin and the Towel (CCLI #1732156)

Prayer after footwashing

(*Voices Together 952*)

Leader: Jesus Christ, our Savior,

you did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,
but emptied yourself, taking the form of a servant.

Humbling yourself before your disciples,

you washed their feet and named them as your friends.

All: With water and a towel, you befriend us.

As we kneel before one another,

we pledge ourselves to your love,

in the power of your servanthood. Amen.

Sending song

Sent Forth by God's Blessing (*Voices Together 812; also HWB 478; One License #40362*)

Benediction

Voices Together 946



5

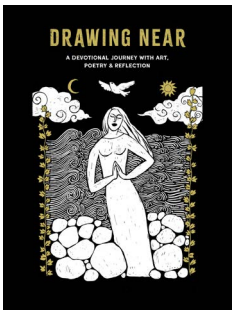
Integrating Art and Worship

The *Anabaptist Community Bible* includes forty original linocut-style artworks, each offering a distinct perspective on a biblical text or story. These amazing images reward careful reflection, especially when combined with a meditation on the affiliated scripture passage.

In a world full of glimpses and glances, a host of images constantly competing for our attention, and twitch-speed reactions to social media posts, consider inviting your congregation to explore the ancient spiritual discipline of “gazing” on an image as part of the worship experience.

One approach might be to organize a five-part sermon series, each featuring a different work of art, based on one of eight themes developed in *Drawing Near: A Devotional Journey with Art, Poetry, and Reflection* (Herald Press, 2025)—an Anabaptism at 500 devotional that pairs each of the forty works of art with an original poem by an Anabaptist writer. A digital resource is available for congregations to display these images in the meeting space. As the image appears on the screen, read the scripture text (perhaps several times). Give people time to simply focus on the image. Then you might offer a brief meditation or pose several questions for reflection. Participants may wish to doodle, sketch, pose questions, or briefly journal during the time of silence. At the end, offer a time to share insights or reflections. If you repeat the exercise with another image and scripture passage, make adjustments as needed depending on the congregations’ response. *Drawing Near* will be available in February 2025 (bit.ly/drawing-near).

A digital version of the forty images that appear in the *Anabaptist Community Bible* and *Drawing Near* can be purchased for congregational use at MennoMedia.org.



Theme, art, and text**Anabaptist Community
Bible page number**

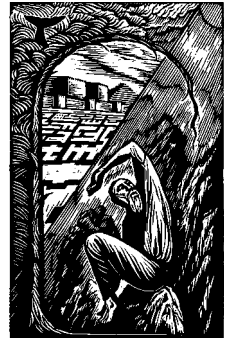
1 God's Shalom Order

<i>Creation Care</i> (Genesis 1:26-31)	5	
<i>Love the Lord Your God</i> (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)	205	
<i>What Does the Lord Require?</i> (Micah 6:8)	1125	◀
<i>The Year of Jubilee</i> (Leviticus 25:1-13, 35-38)	143	
<i>Loving Your Neighbor</i> (Luke 10:25-37)	1269	



2 Suffering and Grief

<i>When You Pass through the Waters</i> (Isaiah 43:1-4)	861	
<i>Jerusalem's Suffering</i> (Lamentations 1)	983	
<i>Jonah Balks at God's Mercy</i> (Jonah 4)	1115	◀
<i>The Travails of Job</i> (book of Job, or Job 3:1-10)	587	
<i>The Woman with a Hemorrhage</i> (Mark 5:24-34)	1229	



3 Forgiveness, Memory, and Transformation

<i>Esau Forgives Jacob</i> (Genesis 33:1-11)	41	
<i>The Ebenezer Stone</i> (1 Samuel 7:7-12)	321	
<i>Loving Enemies</i> (Matthew 5:43-48)	1185	
<i>Emmaus Road: Breaking Bread</i> (Luke 24:13-35)	1291	
<i>Lydia's Conversion</i> (Acts 16:13-15)	1353	◀



4 Resistance

<i>Resisting Genocide: Shiphrah and Puah</i> (Exodus 1:15-21)	65	
<i>Rahab Helps the Spies Escape</i> (Joshua 2:8-21)	245	◀
<i>Deborah: Prophet and Judge</i> (Judges 4:4-10)	279	
<i>Esther's Courage and Creativity</i> (Esther 7)	565	
<i>An Upside-Down Kingdom</i> (Matthew 5:3-12)	1181	





5 Bondage and Liberation

<i>Liberation from Bondage</i> (Exodus 14:15-31)	79
<i>Healing on the Sabbath</i> (Luke 6:1-11)	1259
<i>Jesus' Arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane</i> (John 18:1-12)	1321
<i>Pilate Washes His Hands</i> (Matthew 27:15-24)	1217
▶ <i>Christ's Death and the New Covenant</i> (Hebrews 9:11-14)	1477



6 Women and Mothering

▶ <i>Ruth and Naomi</i> (Ruth 1:8-22)	307
<i>God's Presence</i> (Psalm 139)	733
<i>Woman Wisdom</i> (Proverbs 8:1-12)	755
<i>The Woman at the Well</i> (John 4:4-29)	1299
<i>Abigail Brings a Gift to David</i> (1 Samuel 25:14-35)	345



7 The Body of Christ

▶ <i>Baptism of Jesus</i> (Matthew 3:13-17)	1179
<i>Mary Magdalene Witnesses the Resurrected Jesus</i> (John 20:1-18)	1325
<i>Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch</i> (Acts 8:26-40)	1341
<i>Economic Equality</i> (James 2:1-13)	1487
<i>One Body in Christ</i> (Colossians 3:1-17)	1441



8 Visions of the Future

<i>Praise the Lord!</i> (Psalm 150)	741
<i>Ezekiel's First Vision</i> (Ezekiel 1:1-14)	995
<i>Trees of Living Water</i> (Psalm 1:1-3)	619
<i>A Shoot Will Grow Up from the Stump of Jesse</i> (Isaiah 11:1-2, 6-9)	823
▶ <i>John's Vision: A Woman, Her Child, and the Dragon</i> (Revelation 12:1-6)	1525

6

Readers Theater

The Interrogation: Elisabeth Dirks, 1549

During an active career as missionaries, teachers, writers, and preachers, Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider created a series of short dramatic vignettes, based on primary sources, that were designed to be integrated into a worship service featuring a theme from the Anabaptist story. The Kreiders compiled twenty-four mini-dramas into a booklet titled *Anabaptist Dramatic Readings*, available for free download at CommonWord.ca.

The following mini-drama offers a sense of the flavor of the larger collection of two dozen dramas.

The Interrogation: Elisabeth Dirks, 1549¹

Background: Elisabeth Dirks was born into an aristocratic family in East Friesland, Netherlands, in the early sixteenth century. She was educated in a convent school, where she learned to read Dutch and Latin and came to own a Latin New Testament. She joined an Anabaptist group in Leeuwarden [LAY-oo-var-den] and was appointed to serve it as the first known Anabaptist deaconess. Elisabeth was arrested on January 15, 1549. Leeuwarden city officials were trying to discover the connections that made up the network of Anabaptist subversives. The officers found a Latin Testament in Elizabeth's house.

Requirements: Six (or seven) persons. The interrogator role could be split into two between the two interrogation sessions.

* * * * *

Policeman: We've got her! We've got the teacher. (*to Elisabeth*) Where is your husband, Menno Simons, the teacher?

Narrator: Elisabeth remained silent. The following day two policemen took her to prison. She was called up before the city council.

Interrogator: Elisabeth Dirks, I ask you solemnly to take the oath for testimony.

Elisabeth: We ought not to swear an oath, but our words should be "Yes, yes" and "No, no."

Interrogator: Elisabeth Dirks, do you have a husband?

Elisabeth: The truth is, I have no husband.

Interrogator: We say that you are a teacher and that you seduce many. We have been told this, and we want to know who your friends are.

¹ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Anabaptist Dramatic Readings* (Mennonite Schools Council, 2011), 40–43. Reproduced with permission from Eleanor Kreider. Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 481–82. Comment: C. J. Dyck, "Elisabeth and Hadewijk of Friesland," in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers, Studies in Women and Religion / Études sur les femmes et la religion 3* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 359–64.

Elisabeth: My God has commanded me to love my Lord and my God, and to honor my parents, so I will not tell you who my parents are. What I suffer for the name of Christ is a reproach to my friends.

Interrogator: All right, we will leave this subject alone, but we want to know who you have taught.

Elisabeth: Oh, no, my lords, leave me in peace about this too. Interrogate me about my faith, which I will gladly tell you about.

Interrogator: We shall make you so afraid that you will tell us what we ask.

Elisabeth: I hope through the grace of God that he will keep my tongue so that I shall not become a traitor and deliver my brothers to death.

Interrogator: What persons were present when you were baptized?

Elisabeth: Christ said, "Ask those that were present or who heard it." See John 18:21.

Interrogator: Now we perceive that you are a teacher, for you compare yourself to Christ.

Elisabeth: No, my lords, far be it from me; for I do not esteem myself above even the rubbish which is swept out from the house of the Lord.

Interrogator: What do you believe concerning the house of God? Do you not regard our church as the house of God?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, for it is written: "You are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." See 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Interrogator: What do you believe concerning our Mass?

Elisabeth: My lords, of your Mass I think nothing at all, but I highly esteem all that accords with the Word of God.

Interrogator: What are your views with regard to the most awesome Holy Sacrament?

Elisabeth: I have never in my life read in the holy Scriptures of a holy sacrament, but of the Lord's Supper. Let me show you from the Scriptures . . .

Interrogator: Be silent, for the devil speaks through your mouth.

Elisabeth: My lords, this is a small matter because the servant is not better than her lord.

Interrogator: You speak from a spirit of pride.

Elisabeth: No, my lords, I speak with frankness.

Interrogator: What did the Lord say when he gave his disciples the Supper?

Elisabeth: What did he give them, flesh or bread?

Interrogator: He gave them bread.

Elisabeth: Didn't the Lord remain sitting there? How then could they eat the flesh of the Lord?

Interrogator: What are your views concerning infant baptism, seeing that you have been rebaptized?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, I have not been rebaptized. I have been baptized once upon my faith. It is written that baptism belongs to believers.

Interrogator: Are our children damned then because they are baptized?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. God forbid that I should judge the children.

Interrogator: Do you not seek your salvation in baptism?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, all the water in the sea could not save me, but salvation is in Christ, and he has commanded me to love God my Lord above all things and my neighbor as myself.

Interrogator: Have the priests power to forgive sins?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. How can I believe this? Christ is the only priest through whom sins are forgiven. See Hebrews 7:21.

Interrogator: You say that you believe everything that accords with the holy Scriptures. Do you not believe the words of James?

Elisabeth: Yes, my lords. Why should I not believe them?

Interrogator: Doesn't he say in James 5:14: "Go to the elder of the church that he may anoint you and pray over you"?

Elisabeth: Yes, my lords, but do you mean to say that you belong to this church?

Interrogator: Are you claiming that the Holy Ghost has saved you already so that you need neither confession nor sacrament?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. I acknowledge that I have transgressed the ordinance of the Pope which the Emperor has confirmed by decrees. But prove to me that I have transgressed in any article against my Lord and my God, and I will cry woe over me, miserable being.

Narrator: That was the end of the first session. Later, Elizabeth was again brought before the council and led into the torture chamber. Hans the executioner was present. The officials warned her, "We have so far dealt with you in kindness, but if you will not confess, we will resort to severity." The Procurator General then spoke:

Procurator

General: Master Hans, seize her.

Hans: Oh, no, my lords; she will voluntarily confess.

Narrator: But she would not voluntarily confess, and so he applied the thumbscrews to her thumbs and forefingers so that the blood squirted out at the nails.

Elisabeth: Oh, I cannot endure it any longer.

Interrogator: Confess, and we will relieve your pain.

Elisabeth: Help me, O Lord, your poor handmaiden! For you are a helper in time of need.

Interrogator: Confess, and we will relieve your pain. We told you to confess, not to cry to God the Lord!

Narrator: But she steadfastly adhered to God her Lord, and the Lord took away her pain so that she said to the lords:

Elisabeth: Ask me anything, and I shall answer you, for I no longer feel the least pain in my flesh as I did before.

Interrogator: Will you not yet confess?

Elisabeth: No, my lords.

Narrator: They then applied the screws to her shins, one on each shin.

Elisabeth: O, my lords, do not put me to shame; a man has never touched my bare body.

Procurator

General: Miss Elisabeth, we shall not treat you dishonorably.

Narrator: She then fainted. They said to one another: "Perhaps she is dead." But waking up, she said:

Elisabeth: I am alive. I am not dead.

Narrator: They then took off all the screws and pleaded with her.

Elisabeth: Why do you plead with me like this? This is the way to deal with children.

Narrator: So they obtained not one word from her that was detrimental to her brothers and sisters in the Lord or to any other person.

Interrogator: Will you revoke all that you have previously confessed here?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, but I will seal it with my death.

Interrogator: We will try you no more. Will you voluntarily tell us who baptized you?

Elisabeth: No, my lords; I have told you that I will not confess this.

Narrator: Sentence was then passed on Elisabeth on March 27, 1549. She was condemned to death. After five and a half months of imprisonment, she was drowned in a bag on May 29, 1549, and thus she offered up her body to God.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST



7

Right Remembering

Telling the Story of Anabaptist Beginnings

John D. Roth

At a recent family gathering, my siblings and I were telling stories about a memorable trip we had taken as children. We agreed on the basic outlines of the trip, but our memories differed about almost everything else. Were we still camping with the tent and the Ford station wagon, or had we already upgraded to the pop-up camper and the van? One sibling could recall only good memories—games we had played to pass the long hours on the road, the beautiful scenery at various national parks, our long evenings around the campfire. But another sibling remembered how stressful the trip had been for our mother as she worked out the logistics of meals and packing for a large family. We also could not agree about why our family chose to camp instead of opting for motels, which surely would have entailed less work. Was it for financial reasons? Hardly, one of my siblings insisted! We could have easily afforded more expensive options. Then why did we camp, especially since none of us could remember being all that enthused about smelly outhouses, dank showers, and the constant battle with mosquitoes?

Disagreements over collective memories, of course, are not unique to families. How we tell our stories—the meanings we ascribe to past events, the links between cause and consequence, even the facts themselves—is never a simple matter. Recent public debates over the stories of Indigenous displacement in our national narratives, or the place of religion in a country’s core identity, or what Americans should do with monuments honoring Confederate defenders of slavery all attest to the complexity of memory.

Even if at some basic level we all agree on the “facts”—based on the evidence of primary sources—we never capture history “as it actually happened.” The meaning we give to our stories will inevitably differ as it gets filtered through the perspectives of the teller.

So it is not surprising that when Anabaptists around the world today gather to commemorate five hundred years of their history, the way they tell that story will likely vary.

Three ways (among many!) to tell the story

Among historians, at least three basic approaches have emerged to tell the story of Anabaptist beginnings. Each approach could be considered appropriate depending on the context and the goals of the storyteller. But each approach has its limits as well.

As you tell stories from Anabaptist history (including your own congregation’s history), be attentive to which version of the story you are telling.



1. *As a simple story of faithfulness and heroism*

- Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were earnest Christians who rediscovered the teachings and example of Jesus, recognized that the decision to follow Jesus must be voluntary, and resolved to hold firm to their gospel convictions regardless of the consequences.
- The foundation of the Anabaptist movement was the authority of Scripture, read in community, through the lens of Jesus, aided by the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- The Sermon on the Mount was the best summary of distinctive teachings of Jesus.
- Early Anabaptists' distinctive teachings—adult (or believers) baptism, pacifism, a view of the church as a community, sharing of earthly goods, a commitment to lives of compassionate service—were not new doctrines, but a recovery of the teachings of the apostles in the early church.
- Discipleship included a missionary imperative—early Anabaptists spoke freely of their faith while also bearing faithful witness through a consistency between speech and practice.
- Many, if not most, paid a steep price for their convictions—fines, torture, imprisonment, dispossession of property, forced migration, or judicial execution. Anabaptists understood their suffering to reflect the suffering of Christ, in the strong conviction that they would also share in Christ's resurrection.
- The Anabaptists were unique—they were neither Catholic nor Protestant but represented a “third way,” consistent with the example of Jesus and the pattern of the early church.
- Modern Anabaptists should recover the story of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists as a critique of our accommodation to the status quo and a challenge to adopt more radical expressions of faith—peacemaking, community life, simplicity, rejection of materialism, service, international awareness.

2. *As a minor event embedded in the political, economic, and social context of its day*

- The early Anabaptist movement was actually quite small—the historian C.-P. Clasen called it a “minor episode in the history of the Reformation.”¹ Many people in the sixteenth century regarded it as a radical movement and violent threat to social order. In later centuries it largely disappeared from public view.
- Although its leaders used religious language, the movement itself can also be explained by its sociological, economic, and cultural contexts. Anabaptism emerged out of the social and economic realities of the Peasants' War of 1525—widespread outrage against the injustices of feudalism, especially burdensome taxes and church tithes; hopes for a more egalitarian social; and the economic necessity of sharing resources in a subsistence economy.

¹ Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618* (Cornell University Press, 1972), 29.

- Led by Thomas Müntzer (who corresponded with Anabaptist Conrad Grebel), the peasants' uprising was resoundingly defeated in early 1525, precisely when Anabaptism was gaining popularity. Pacifism, mutual aid, priesthood of all believers, and so on were efforts to keep alive the ideals of the Peasants' War—but now intended only for a small community of committed believers who separated themselves from the larger society.
 - Even after the Peasants' War, the Anabaptist movement continued to pose a deep threat to social order. Anabaptist leaders were not persecuted as martyrs; they were legally prosecuted as criminals. The violent Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster (1534–1535) revealed the dangers lurking within Anabaptism.
 - Anabaptism was a diverse and fragmented movement from the very beginning. The movement was never entirely clear about the meaning of voluntary baptism, and there were few shared understandings of what it meant to be an “Anabaptist.” Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Pilgram Marpeck, the Schleithem tradition of the Swiss Brethren, the communitarian Hutterites, the apocalyptic evangelism of Melchior Hoffman, the violent visionaries who occupied the city of Muenster, the progressive and enlightened Dutch Waterlander tradition—all claimed to be “Anabaptists.” Yet many of these groups or individuals had little in common beyond adult baptism.
 - Not surprisingly, Anabaptism today can mean almost whatever we want it to mean.
3. *“Right remembering”*: As a (sometimes flawed) renewal movement within the broader Christian tradition
- Like all movements, early Anabaptism was rooted in historical context. But Anabaptism cannot be *reduced* to its historical context. It was also deeply shaped by religiously motivated ideals and theological convictions.
 - Born as a renewal movement within Catholicism, Anabaptism reflected the theological influence of late medieval mysticism (e.g., *Gelassenheit*/yieldedness), the practical faith of Thomas à Kempis (e.g., discipleship), and the religious ideals of monasticism (e.g., membership in a voluntary, disciplined, pacifist community that shared resources and regarded its communal life as a collective witness to the world).
 - Anabaptism also borrowed heavily from Erasmus and a movement known as humanism, which criticized abuses in the church, emphasized a practical application of faith, and called for a return to apostolic church.
 - Anabaptism shared many themes of the broader Reformation. The movement borrowed heavily from the broader Reformation leadership of Martin Luther (e.g., *sola Scriptura*, or “by Scripture alone”; the priesthood of all believers; courage to resist tradition and institution of the papacy) and the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (e.g., a “people of God” united by the covenant; simplicity of worship).



- History is always told from a limited perspective. However, there are ways of telling the story other than heroic narratives or cynical exposés.

Right remembering

The Anabaptism at 500 project is committed to the principles of “right remembering.” Among other things, this includes the following commitments:

1. Tell the story *honestly*, based on sources that are accessible and open to critical assessment by anyone who might be interested.
2. Tell the story *empathetically*, attentive to both the theological motives expressed by the participants and the historical context that shaped their choices. Be attentive to the dilemmas faced by authorities who cared about tradition and social order, as well as to the expressions of Christian faithfulness advocated by Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and other groups (Sabbatarians, Anti-trinitarians, Socinians, etc.) that didn’t agree with Anabaptists.
3. Tell the story *confessionally*, recognizing its complexity and the shadow sides that often accompany heroic and clear convictions.
4. Tell the story *expectantly*, open to the possibility that it can inspire deeper faithfulness to Christ today.



8

Going to the Sources

Ten Historical Documents about Anabaptist Beginnings

The following excerpts from sixteenth-century sources provide an intimate perspective on the early years of Anabaptism, the renewal movement that ultimately gave rise to the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish and shaped the identity of other groups such as the Baptists, Church of the Brethren, and Brethren in Christ.

Consider organizing a youth or adult Sunday school class around these texts. Each Sunday, the leader could provide a bit of historical context for the specific text. Then read the text aloud, inviting participants to highlight key words or phrases. What jumps out as particularly interesting? Confusing? Inspiring?

For a basic introduction into the Anabaptist story, start with the following texts:

- Troy Osborne, *Radicals and Reformers: A Survey of Global Anabaptist History* (Herald Press, 2024).
- John D. Roth, *Stories: How Mennonites Came to Be* (Herald Press, 2006). A study guide is available at [HeraldPress.com/Study-Guides](https://www.heraldpress.com/study-guides).

1. Zurich Council Mandate for Infant Baptism (January 18, 1525)¹

Renewal movements like Anabaptism never have precise beginnings. Many streams fed into the Anabaptist movement as it emerged in the context of the Swiss Reformation in the mid-1520s. But the first adult baptisms, which took place in Zurich on the evening of January 21, 1525, have come to mark the symbolic beginning of Anabaptism. This first excerpt captures the rising concerns among civic officials in Zurich in response to a growing chorus of voices that were critical of infant baptism, claiming that the practice had no basis in Scripture.

All those who have hitherto left their children unbaptized shall have them baptized within the next eight days. And anyone who refuses to do this shall, with wife and child and possessions, leave our lords' city, jurisdiction, and domain, and never return, or await what happens to him. Everyone will know how to conduct himself accordingly.

¹ *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. Leland Harder (Herald Press, 1985), 336.

2. An Account of Anabaptist Beginnings²

The most complete description of Anabaptist beginnings comes to us from the Hutterite Chronicle in the mid-sixteenth century.

Both [Luther and Zwingli] baptized infants and rejected the true baptism of Christ, which is sure to bring the cross with it. However much they reviled the pope in other respects, they followed him in the practice of infant baptism, taking over from him the leaven that gives rise to all kinds of evil, the very gateway to false Christianity. The pope had just as little scriptural foundation for infant baptism as for purgatory, the mass, the worship of saints, letters of indulgence, and the like.

Luther and Zwingli defended their teaching with the sword, as they had learned from the antichrist, their father and chief, knowing well that Christian knighthood is not of the flesh but is mighty before God to destroy all human attacks. Therefore, faith cannot be forced but is a gift of God. Christ says to his disciples, “If any man wants to follow me (take note: if any man wants to, desires to), let him deny himself and take his cross upon him.” He does not say the sword, for that has no place at the cross. Sword and cross are as much akin to each other as Pilate and Christ or a wolf and a sheep in the fold.

Because God wanted one united people, separated from all other peoples, he brought forth the Morning Star, the light of his truth, to shine with all its radiance in the present age of this world. He wanted in particular to visit the German lands with his Word and to reveal the foundation of divine truth, so that his holy work could be recognized by everyone. It began in Switzerland, where God brought about an awakening. First of all a meeting took place between Ulrich Zwingli, Conrad Grebel (a member of the nobility), and Felix Mantz. All three were men of learning with a thorough knowledge of German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. They started to discuss matters of faith and realized that infant baptism is unnecessary and, moreover, is not baptism at all.

Two of them, Conrad and Felix, believed that people should be truly baptized in the Christian order appointed by the Lord, because Christ himself says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” Ulrich Zwingli (who shrank from the cross, disgrace, and persecution that Christ suffered) refused to agree—he said it would cause an uproar. But Conrad and Felix said that was no reason to disobey the clear command of God.

At this point a man came from Chur, a priest named Georg, from the house of Jakob, later known as Georg Blaurock. Once when they were discussing questions of faith, Georg shared his own views. Someone asked who had just spoken. “It was the man in the blue coat (*blauer Rock*).” So he was given this name because he had worn a blue coat. This same Georg had come because of his extraordinary zeal. Everyone thought of him as a plain, simple priest; but he was moved by God’s grace to holy zeal in matters of faith and worked courageously for the truth.

He, too, had first approached Zwingli and discussed questions of faith with him at length, but he had gotten nowhere. Then he was told that there were other men more on fire than Zwingli. He inquired eagerly about them and met with them, that is, with Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz, to talk about questions of faith. They came to unity about these questions. In the fear of God they agreed that from God’s Word one must first learn true faith, expressed in deeds of love, and on confession of this faith receive true Christian baptism as a covenant of a good conscience with God, serving him from

² *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, trans. and ed. the Hutterian Brethren (Plough, 1987), 43–46. Used by permission.

then on with a holy Christian life and remaining steadfast to the end, even in times of tribulation.

One day when they were meeting, fear came over them and struck their hearts. They fell on their knees before the almighty God in heaven and called upon him who knows all hearts. They prayed that God grant it to them to do his divine will and that he might have mercy on them. Neither flesh and blood nor human wisdom compelled them. They were well aware of what they would have to suffer for this.

After the prayer, Georg Blaurock stood up and asked Conrad Grebel in the name of God to baptize him with true Christian baptism on his faith and recognition of the truth. With this request he knelt down, and Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no appointed servant of the Word. Then the others turned to Georg in their turn, asking him to baptize them, which he did. And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord. They confirmed one another for the service of the Gospel and began to teach the faith and to keep it. This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways.

Soon after this, more people joined them, like Balthasar Hubmaier of Friedberg and Ludwig Haetzer, and other scholars of German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, well acquainted with the Scriptures, as well as priests and preachers and other people. Soon they all gave witness with their blood.

3. The Growth of the Early Anabaptist Movement³

The Hutterite Chronicle also gives an account of the rapid growth that took place in the emerging Anabaptist movement in the first few weeks immediately after the baptisms in January 1525.

So the movement spread through persecution and great tribulation. The church increased daily, and the number of the Lord's people grew quickly.

This the enemy of divine truth could not endure, so he used Zwingli as a tool. Zwingli began to write and preach with fanaticism that baptism of adult believers was false and should not be tolerated. This was contrary to his earlier confession, when he himself had taught that not one clear word from God justified infant baptism. But now, because he wanted to please men and the world rather than God, he opposed true Christian baptism. He persuaded the authorities to use the imperial law to behead as Anabaptists those who were truly dedicated to God, those who out of conviction had made the bond of a good conscience with him.

Finally Zwingli succeeded in having twenty men, widows, pregnant women, and young girls thrown into misery in a dark tower. They were shut up with only bread and water and saw neither sun nor moon for the rest of their lives. They were condemned to remain in the dark tower—the living and the dead together—to suffocate in the stench, die, and rot, until not one of them was left. There were some who did not take one bite of bread in three days so that the others would have something to eat.

At the same time severe mandates were issued at Zwingli's instigation: from now on, any person in the district of Zurich who was baptized should be thrown into the water and drowned without any trial or judgment. That shows the spirit Zwingli belonged to, and his followers still belong to it.

³ *Chronicle of Hutterian Brethren*, 46-47. Used by permission.



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4. Sentence Issued by Zurich City Council, March 7, 1526⁴

As the Anabaptist movement continued to spread, Zurich city officials responded with increasingly harsh sentences.

Concerning these Anabaptists, it is declared that . . . they shall be put together into the New Tower; and they shall be given nothing to eat but bread and water and bedded on straw. And the attendant who guards them shall under oath let no one come to them or go away from them. Thus let them die in the Tower unless anyone desists from his acts and error and intends to be obedient. . . .

It is further decided to issue an open mandate everywhere indicating the severe imprisonment of the Anabaptists. And [that] anyone who baptizes hereafter will be drowned without mercy and thus brought from life to death.

* * * * *

5. Felix Manz, “Letter from Prison to the Anabaptist Congregation in Basel” (1526)⁵

Felix Manz, the first martyr of the Anabaptists, was born in Zurich in 1498. Trained in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and was part of a circle of students who gathered regularly to study Scripture before disagreements with Zwingli emerged around the tithe, the mass, and especially baptism. After the baptisms of January 21, 1525, Manz became a strong leader in the movement, preaching and debating in Zurich and the surrounding countryside. He was frequently jailed and released by Zurich authorities until his arrest and execution by drowning in January 1527.

My heart rejoices in God. He has given me much knowledge and wisdom, whereby I can escape the eternal and unending death. Therefore, I praise you, Lord Christ in heaven! For you have taken away my distress and unhappiness. You my savior have been sent by God as a model and light. You have called me before my final days into your heavenly kingdom so that I may have eternal joy with God and love him and his righteousness which remains both here and in eternity.

Without this righteousness, nothing can help or endure. That is why so many people who do not have this are deceived by various empty opinions. Unfortunately, we find many people these days who exult in the gospel and teach, speak, and preach much about it, yet are full of hatred and envy. They do not have the love of God in them, and their deceptions are known to everyone. For as we have experienced in these last days, there are those who have come to us in sheep’s clothing, yet are ravaging wolves who hate the pious ones of this world and thwart their way to life and the true fold. This is what the false prophets and hypocrites of this world do. These are the ones who both curse and pray with the same mouth and live unruly lives. These are the ones who call upon the government leaders to murder us, destroying the very substance of Christ. But I will praise Christ the Lord for his great patience with us. He teaches us with divine grace

⁴ *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 447–48.

⁵ Excerpted from *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Liechty (Paulist Press, Inc., 1994), 18–19. Used with permission of Paulist Press (www.PaulistPress.com).



and shows love to all people, which is the nature of God, his heavenly Father. No false prophet could do this.

Let us take special note of this difference. The sheep of Christ seek the honor of God. They choose this and allow neither property nor temporal goods to hinder them in it, for they stand under the protection of Christ. Christ the Lord does not force anyone to his glory. It is obtained only by those who want it and ready themselves for it through true faith and baptism. When a person works authentic fruits of repentance, the heaven of eternal joy, which comes by grace through Christ, is secured for that person and obtained through Christ's innocent blood, which was willingly shed. For with his blood he demonstrated his love for us and gave us part in the power of his Spirit.

Whoever receives and exercises this gift will grow and become complete in God. Only the love of God through Christ is meaningful and enduring—not boasts, threats or denunciations. Love alone is pleasing to God. Anyone who does not have love has no place with God. The genuine love of Christ will scatter the enemy. Whoever would be an heir with Christ is also expected to be merciful, just as the heavenly Father is merciful. Christ never brought legal proceedings against anyone as the false teachers of our time do. They show by this that they do not have the love of Christ and do not understand his word. Yet they want to be shepherds and teachers! They will one day despair, if they do not mend their ways, when they realize that they have earned by this eternal anguish.

Christ never showed hatred toward anyone. Therefore, following Christ in the true way which he himself showed us, his true servants would also hate no one. We have before us this light of life and we rejoice to walk in that way. But whoever is full of hatred and envy, whoever villainously betrays, accuses, beats and quarrels, cannot be a Christian. These are the ones who run after Christ like thieves and murderers and use any pretense to shed innocent blood. Anyone can see from this that they do not belong to Christ. They are children of Belial, for out of envy they work to destroy the order of Jesus Christ, doing just as Cain did when he murdered his brother Abel when God found Abel's offerings acceptable.

Here I will finish my reflections. I admonish all of the pious to consider the fall of Adam. When he accepted the advice of the serpent and was disobedient to God, he was cursed with the punishment of death. This will also happen to those who do not accept Christ, those who resist him, those who love the world and do not love God. So I close with this statement, that I will remain steadfast in Christ, trust in him who knows my every need and can deliver me from it. Amen.

6. Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God at Schleithem (February 24, 1527)⁶

By early 1527, authorities in Zurich and the surrounding cantons had begun to impose the death penalty on the "rebaptizers" (Wiedertäufer = Anabaptists), and the movement was forced underground. At the same time, the rapid spread of Anabaptism had created confusion about its central convictions. In late February 1527, a group of Anabaptists, led by Michael Sattler, a former Benedictine prior, gathered in the small hamlet of Schleithem (Canton Schaffhausen), and reached an agreement on seven basic points of belief and practice. Although not all Anabaptists regarded the "Brotherly

⁶ *The Schleithem Confession*, trans. and ed. John Howard Yoder (Herald Press, 1977), 10–19.

Union” as authoritative in the decades that followed, the themes at Schleithem remained central motifs among the Amish and Mennonite groups who traced their roots to Switzerland and South Germany.

The articles we have dealt with, and in which we have been united, are these:

First. Notice concerning baptism: Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life, and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us. Hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope. For this you have the reasons and testimony of the writings and practice of the apostles [Matthew 28; Mark 16; Acts 2, 8, 16, 19]. We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold the same.

Second. We have been united as follows concerning the ban: The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after [Him] in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brethren or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. The same shall be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ [Matthew 18]. But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.

Third. Concerning the breaking of bread we have become one and agree thus: All those who desire to break the one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ, and all those who wish to drink of one drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, they must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God, whose Head is Christ, and that by baptism. For as Paul indicates, we cannot be partakers at the same time of the table of the Lord and the table of devils. Nor can we partake and drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. That is: all those who have fellowship with the dead works of darkness have no part in the light Thus all who follow the devil and the world, have no part with those who have been called out of the world unto God. All those who lie in evil have no part in the good.

So it shall and must be, that whoever does not share the calling of the one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body together with all the children of God, may not be made into one loaf together with them, as must be true if one wishes truly to break bread according to the command of Christ.

Fourth. We have been united concerning separation: A separation shall take place from the evil and the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this; that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations. So it is; since all who have not entered into the obedience of faith and have not united themselves with God so that they will do His will, are a great abomination before God, therefore nothing else can or really will grow up or spring forth from them except abominable things. Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good and evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who are [come] out of the world, God’s temple and idols, Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other. . . .



Fifth. We have been united as follows concerning shepherds in the church of God:

The shepherd in the church of God shall be a person according to the rule of Paul, fully and completely, who has a good report of those who are outside the faith. The office of such a person shall be to read and exhort and teach, warn, admonish, or ban in the congregation, to properly to preside among the brothers and sisters in prayer, and in the breaking of bread, and in all things to take care of the body of Christ, that it may be built up and developed, so that the name of God might be praised and honored through us, and the mouth of the mocker be stopped.

He shall be supported, wherein he has need, by the congregation that has chosen him, so that he who serves the gospel can also live therefrom as the Lord has ordered. But should a shepherd do something worthy of reprimand, nothing shall be done with him without the voice of two or three witnesses. . . .

But if the shepherd should be driven away or led to the Lord by the cross, at the same hour another shall be ordained to his place, so that the little folk and the little flock of God may not be destroyed, but be preserved by warning and be consoled.

Sixth. We have been united as follows concerning the sword: The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked, and guards and protects the good. In the law the sword is established over the wicked for punishment and for death, and the secular rulers are established to wield the same.

But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh, simply the warning and the command to sin no more. . . .

Second, is asked concerning the sword: whether a Christian shall pass sentence in disputes and strife about worldly matters, such as the unbelievers have with one another. The answer: Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother concerning inheritance, but refused to do so. So should we also do. . . .

Lastly one can see in the following points that it does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. That houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christian is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and with the Word of God. . . .

Seventh. We have been united as follows concerning the oath: . . . all swearing is forbidden. We cannot perform what is promised in swearing, for we are not able to change the smallest part of ourselves. . . . Christ also taught us similarly when He says: Your speech shall be yea, yea; and nay, nay; for what is more than that comes of evil. He says, your speech or your word shall be yes and no, so that no one might understand that He has permitted it. Christ is simply yea and nay, and all those who seek Him simply will understand His Word. Amen. . . .

Dear brethren and sisters in the Lord: these are the articles which some brothers previously had understood wrongly and in a way not conformed to the true meaning. . . . Now that you have abundantly understood the will of God as revealed through us at this time, you must fulfill this will, now known, persistently and unswervingly. . . . May the name of God be forever blessed and greatly praised, Amen. May the Lord give you His peace. Amen.



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7. Hans Hut, “On the Mystery of Baptism” (1526)⁷

Hans Hut was one of the most significant early Anabaptist leaders. Active mostly in South Germany and Austria, he developed an apocalyptic interpretation of Scripture that led him to proclaim that Christ would return at Pentecost of 1528. He baptized using the sign of the Tau (for the Greek letter T), marked with water on the forehead of the new believer, so that Christ would recognize the true believers upon his return. The following excerpt provides insight into Hut’s expectation that suffering would be an essential part of the Christian life—believers should expect nothing less. In making this argument, Hut drew heavily on analogies from the natural world that he formulated as “the gospel of all creatures.”

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, if you truly desire to know the judgements of God and witness the Holy Spirit in truth, do not listen to the cries of those who preach for money. Rather seek the poor, those forsaken by the world and called fanatics and devils, following the example of Christ and the apostles. Listen to these. For no one may obtain the truth except he follow in the footsteps of Christ and his elect in the school of affliction, nor have the least part in following the will of God in the vindication of the cross of Christ. For the mysteries of divine wisdom cannot be learned in the rogues’ galleries of Wittenburg or Paris. Neither can they be learned in the lords’ courts while living on a comfortable stipend. For the wisdom of God does not dwell among those living in ease. . . .

If we want to arrive at a correct understanding and judgment concerning baptism, we must not rely on our human thoughts and toss aside the form and practice of Christ and his apostles. . . .

First of all, Christ said, go into all the world and preach the gospel of all creatures. Next he said, who believes; thirdly, and is baptized, will be saved. This order must be kept if we want to achieve a true Christian life and break the whole world to pieces. . . .

The gospel of all creatures is about nothing other than Christ the crucified one. But not only Christ the Head was crucified, but rather Christ in all his members. This Christ is what is preached and taught by all creatures. The whole Christ suffers in all members. . . . Paul gives witness of this when he said, I rejoice in my suffering, for in this I restore what is lacking of Christ’s suffering in my own body. . . .

The gospel of all creatures is nothing other than the power of God to bless all those who believe. If a person wants to understand and confess God’s power and divinity, God’s invisible essence, through the works or creatures of the creation of the world, then he must note and consider that Christ always communicated the kingdom of heaven and the power of God to the common person through the use of parables, pointing to a creature or to different handicrafts or different sorts of human occupations. He never sent a poor man to books like our scholars do, lacking all understanding. Rather he taught and witnessed the gospel to them through their work. . . . Jesus taught the gospel to the gardener by using the trees, to the fisherman by using the catch of fish, to the carpenter by using the house, to the goldsmith by using the smelting of gold (Matthew 13; Luke 13; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 5). He taught the gospel to the housewife by using the dough

⁷ Excerpted from *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, 65, 67–69, 73, 81. Used with permission of Paulist Press (www.PaulistPress.com).

(Isaiah 5; Jeremiah 2; Matthew 20; Luke 20; John 15). He taught the gospel to the vinekeeper by using the vineyards, vines and grapes (Matthew 9); to the tailor by using the patch on old cloth (Matthew 13); to the merchant by using pearls (Matthew 9; Mark 2; Luke 10; Joel 3). He taught the gospel to the reaper by using the harvest (Isaiah 10); to the woodcutter by using the axe and tree (Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11; John 10; Ezekiel 37; Hebrews 13); to the shepherd by using the sheep (Psalm 2; Isaiah 30; Jeremiah 18; Romans 9; Revelation 2; Ezekiel 34). . . .

The thing in all of these parables to note well is that the creatures are made to suffer in human work. It is through this pain that they reach their goals, that is, what they were created for. In the same way no human comes to salvation except through the suffering and tribulation which is the work of God in him.

So the whole of scripture and all the creatures illustrate the suffering of Christ in all his members. Therefore, the scripture is figured simply in the creatures. . . .

Therefore the water of tribulation is the real essence and power of baptism, by which the person is swallowed up in the death of Christ. This baptism was not first instituted in the time of Christ. It has been from the beginning and is a baptism with which all friends of God, from Adam to the present, are baptized, as Paul said. . . . God administers [true baptism] through the water of tribulation and in return He offers the comfort of the Holy Spirit. . . .

According to the word of Christ and all of scripture, one should baptize nobody except one who gives an ardent and trustworthy account of his faith. Where this sign of baptism is accepted, it symbolizes the coming baptism of suffering. It is in this sense that one may say, “without baptism there is no salvation.” But infant baptism is not only unnecessary, it is the greatest hindrance of the truth.

* * * * *

8. Anna Jansz's Testament⁸

Anna Jansz was born in 1510 to a well-to-do family in South Holland. At the age of twenty-four, she accepted adult baptism in 1534 from Maynaart von Emden, a Münsterite Anabaptist leader who had been sent to Briel to announce the coming of the New Jerusalem in Münster. After a brief time fleeing persecution in England, she returned to the Netherlands with an infant son and was quickly arrested. On January 24, 1539, a day after her sentencing, Anna was executed by drowning. As she was led to her execution, Anna pleaded for someone in the crowd to care for her son, a scene depicted in a famous image in Martyrs Mirror. Anna's testament to her son, a letter she wrote while in prison, was initially printed as a pamphlet and incorporated into the first Dutch Mennonite book of martyr stories and hymns, The Sacrifice of the Lord (1562). Eventually it also appeared in the 1685 edition of the Martyrs Mirror and, revised as a hymn, in the Swiss Brethren hymnbook known as the Ausbund. The song is still sung by the Amish today.

My son, hear the instruction of your mother; open your ears to hear the words of my mouth. Behold, I go today the way of the prophets, apostles and martyrs, and drink of the cup of which they all have drunk. I go, I say, the way which Christ Jesus, the eternal word of the Father, full of grace and truth, the Shepherd of the sheep, who is the Life, Himself went,

⁸ Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm, 12th ed. (Herald Press, 1979), 453–54.

and who went this way and not another, and who had to drink of this cup, even as He said: I have a cup to drink of, and a baptism to be baptized with. . . .

My son, if you desire to enter into the regions of the holy world and into the inheritance of the saints, follow after them; search the Scriptures, and it shall show you their ways. The angel who spoke to the prophet said: A holy city has been built, and set upon a broad field, and is full of all good things; the entrance thereof is narrow, and set in a dangerous place to fall, like as if there were a fire on the right hand, and on the left deep water, and only one path between them both, even between the fire and the water. See, my son, this way has no retreats; there are no roundabout or crooked little paths; whosoever departs to the right or to the left inherits death. . . .

Therefore, my child, do not regard the great number, nor walk in their ways. . . . But where you hear of a poor, simple, cast-off little flock, which is despised and rejected by the world, join them; for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ. Flee the shadow of this world; become united with God; fear Him alone, keep His commandments, observe all His words, write them on the table of your heart, bind them upon your forehead, speak day and night of His law and you will be a pleasant tree and a sprout in the courts of the Lord, a beloved plant growing up in Zion. Take the fear of the Lord to be your father, and wisdom shall be the mother of your understanding. . . .

Honor the Lord in the works of your hands, and let the light of the Gospel shine through you. Love your neighbor. Deal with an open, warm heart your bread to the hungry, clothe the naked, and do not tolerate having two of anything, because there are always some who lack. Whatever the Lord grants you from the sweat of your brow, above what you need, share with those who love the Lord. . . .

O my son, let your life be conformed to the gospel, and the God of peace sanctify your soul and body, to his praise. Amen.

* * * * *

9. Menno Simons, “Confession of My Enlightenment, Conversion, and Calling”⁹

In the aftermath of the violent end to the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster (1534–1535), Menno Simons (1492–1561) emerged as a crucial leader who reestablished the Dutch Anabaptist movement on the foundation of Christian nonviolence and discipleship in accordance with the teachings of Christ. Menno began his career as a Catholic priest. In this text, he relates the story of his slow conversion to the Anabaptist cause, a decision that was sparked by his close study of Scripture, but also by his compassion for those who had been deceived by the false claims of the Münsterite prophets.

Dear Reader,

I write to you the truth in Christ, and lie not. I entered upon my service as a priest in the Catholic Church, Anno Domini 1524. This took place at Pingjum, my father’s village, where two other priests about my age also officiated. One of them was my pastor, educated to some extent, and the other was my junior. Both had read the Scriptures somewhat, but I in my lifetime had not touched them. I was afraid that if I read them, I would be misled. You see what a stupid preacher I was for almost two years.

During the first year the thought occurred to me as often as I officiated at the Mass,

⁹ Menno Simons, “Confession of My Enlightenment, Conversion, and Calling”; *The New Birth and Who They Are Who Have the Promise*, trans. and ed. Irvin B. Horst (Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1996), 9–24. Used by permission.

that the bread and the wine were not the flesh and blood of the Lord. I thought the devil suggested this to me so that he might undermine my faith. I confessed my doubt, sighed, and prayed, but still it persisted.

In our daily life my two companions and I with others spent our time in card-playing, drinking, and other diversions as, alas, is the way and nature of such idle persons. Then when we talked a bit about Scripture, I could not say a word without being ridiculed, for I did not know at all what I was aiming at—so concealed was God’s Word from my eyes.

Finally, I thought I would diligently examine the New Testament. Before I read very far, I saw at once that we were deceived. My troubled conscience about the bread was immediately relieved, even without anyone instructing me. Still, Luther helped me as far as seeing that human injunctions could not be bound up with threats of eternal death.

Through the illumination and grace of the Lord I made daily progress in the knowledge of Scripture, and before long I was known by some (though wrongly) as an evangelical preacher. Everyone looked for and wanted me, for the world loved me and I, the world. At the same time it was said that I preached God’s word and was a good fellow.

After this it happened—before I ever heard of any Brethren [i.e., Anabaptists]—a devout hero of the faith, Sicke Snijder by name, was beheaded at Leeuwarden because he had been rebaptized. It sounded very strange to me to hear about a second baptism. I investigated carefully what the Scriptures had to say and thought seriously about them but could find no account of infant baptism.

When I now saw this, I had a talk with my pastor about the matter, and after many words he admitted that infant baptism was without scriptural foundation. Still, I dared not trust my own understanding entirely but sought the advice of several old authors. They taught me that infants by baptism are cleansed from original sin. I thought it better to hold to Scripture and noted that they ignored Christ’s blood.

After that, eager to know the grounds for the practice of infant baptism, I consulted Luther. He taught me that children should be baptized upon their own faith. I saw that this also did not agree with God’s Word.

Third, I went to Bucer. He taught that children should be baptized so that they might be nurtured more diligently in the ways of the Lord. I saw that this, also, was without a firm footing.

Fourth, I turned to Bullinger. He pointed to the covenant and circumcision. This I found likewise without support in Scripture.

When I now observed how the authors differed so widely among themselves and how each followed his own ingenuity, then I saw clearly that we were deceived in regard to infant baptism.

A short time afterwards I was chosen at another village called Witmarsum where I was born. I went there out of a desire for gain and a craving for a greater name. There I spoke much about the word of the Lord without the spirit and love as all hypocrites do. In this way I gave birth to disciples of my own kind—idle boasters, frivolous talkers, who like myself, alas, had little care for the matters mentioned above.

Although I knew much from the Scriptures, I wasted that knowledge in youthful lusts, in an impure and carnal life. I sought only profit, ease, human favor, glory, a name with honor as in general all do who live a high life.

So, dear reader, I received knowledge of both baptism and the Lord’s Supper through the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with much reading and meditation on Scripture by



God's gracious favor and gift, not by the help and means of the seducing sects as is said of me. I hope that I write the truth and am not seeking worthless fame. Still, if some persons have contributed to my knowledge, I shall always thank the Lord for this.

Meanwhile it happened, when I had lived there about a year, that several persons introduced adult baptism. Where these initiators came from or lived and who they actually were is to this day still unknown to me. Also, I never saw them.

Following this, the Münster sect appeared, and deceived many devoted persons, also in our district. I was much distressed in spirit, for I observed that, although they were zealous, they erred in doctrine. *Zulum videbam, sed non scientiam* [I saw zeal but not knowledge]. With my limited talent I opposed them as much as I could with preaching and admonishing. Twice I dealt with one of their leaders—once privately and once in public. However, my admonitions had little effect, for I myself did that which I knew was not right.

The report spread widely that I could skillfully silence them. The people appealed to me regardless of who they were, and I saw clearly that I was becoming a defender and surety for the unrepentant. The fact that all leaned on me gave me no small shock. I sighed and prayed, "Lord, help me that I do not become chargeable for the sins of others."

I was troubled in spirit and thought about the outcome. What if I won the whole world and also lived a thousand years and then finally had to submit to God's punishment and wrath? What would I have gained?

Subsequently the poor, straying sheep—wandering about without true shepherds and after many cruel edicts, stranglings, and executions—came together close to where I lived at a place called Oude Clooster. There they, alas, through the ungodly doctrine of Münster resisted with the sword—this action being against the spirit, word, and example of Christ who commanded Peter to thrust the sword into its sheath.

When this had happened in this way, the blood of these people, although misled, fell so hot on my heart that I could not bear it. Neither could I find rest in my spirit. I thought about my impure and carnal life and about my hypocritical doctrine and idolatry. This I daily practiced without any joy in my soul. I saw with my own eyes that these zealous children voluntarily gave their lives and goods (although not for a right doctrine) for their faith, and I was one of those who had exposed for some of them the popish abominations. In spite of this I remained in my life of ease and known, odious habits—just because I wanted to enjoy physical comfort and avoid the cross of the Lord.

As I turned this over in my mind, my heart troubled me so that I could endure it no longer. I thought to myself, "Miserable man that I am, what am I doing? If I remain in this situation and do not hold to the word of my Lord with the knowledge I have received; if I do not reprove the hypocrisy of the educated and their unrepentant carnal living and their perverse baptism, Lord's Supper, and their false religion with the word of the Lord in spite of my limited gift; if I do not lay bare the right foundation of the truth because of the fear of the flesh; if I do not with all that is in my power to point the innocent, straying sheep—who would gladly do what is right if they only knew how—to the true pastures of Christ; oh, how their blood (although spilled amiss) will rise up against me at the judgment of the almighty and great God, who will pronounce true sentence on my poor, miserable soul!"

My heart trembled within me, and I prayed to God with sighing and tears that he would give to me—a sorrowing sinner—the gift of his grace, create a pure heart in me, and



mercifully forgive my impure ways and idle life of ease through the merit of the red blood of Christ; that he would grant to me a courageous heart with wisdom, spirit, and confidence so that I might truly preach his most adorable name and holy Word.

* * * * *

10. Menno Simons, “True Evangelical Faith” (1539)¹⁰

In 1539, Menno set forth a basic outline for Christian ministers—but also for all believers who were committed to following Jesus in daily life. In a text titled Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing, he summarized his convictions in a long sentence that has since become a favorite text among those who are part of the Anabaptist tradition.

True evangelical faith . . . cannot lie dormant, but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love; it dies to the flesh and blood; it destroys all forbidden lusts and desires; it seeks and serves and fears God; it clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters those that harm it; it prays for those that persecute it; it teaches, admonishes, and reproveth with the Word of the Lord; it seeks that which is lost; it binds up that which is wounded; it heals that which is diseased and it saves that which is sound; it has become all things to all men.



¹⁰ *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John C. Wenger (Herald Press, 1956), 307.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



9

Sharing Stories

How Does Your Story Fit into the Larger Anabaptist Narrative?

Consider the following activities to gain a deeper understanding of your congregation's or group's place within the Anabaptist tradition and celebrate its unique contributions to the five-hundred-year legacy of Anabaptism.

1. Trace your church's roots

- a. Research the specific history of your congregation within the broader Anabaptist movement. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO.org) contains a wealth of useful information.
- b. Explore how your congregation was founded, identify significant milestones, and list influential leaders. What themes have helped shape your congregation's identity?
- c. Create a timeline or a visual representation of your congregation's history.

2. Reflect on current contributions

- a. How does your congregation or group currently embody Anabaptist principles in worship, service, and community life?
- b. Highlight recent initiatives or programs that reflect Anabaptist values.
- c. Celebrate the unique ways your group contributes to the larger Anabaptist narrative.

3. Engage in intergenerational dialogue

- a. Facilitate conversations between older and younger members about their experiences and visions for the future. Include a time in your worship service to interview elder members about key stories in the history of your congregation
- b. Note how the stories and testimonies from different generations may differ in emphasis or detail, thereby creating a rich tapestry of your congregation's legacy.

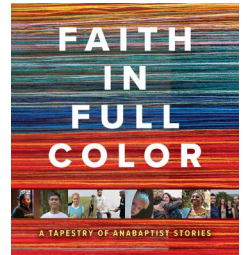


4. Document and share your journey

- a. Create a booklet, website, or video documentary that chronicles your group's reflections and historical journey.
- b. Share this documentation within your community and with other Anabaptist groups.

5. Share stories from the wider Anabaptist community

- a. After sharing your story, consider hearing stories from the wider Anabaptist community.
- b. Read *Faith in Full Color: A Tapestry of Anabaptist Stories* (Herald Press, 2025). If your congregation were to write or photograph a similar contribution, what would it be about? *Faith in Full Color* will be available in May 2025 (bit.ly/Ana500TK41).
- c. Read back issues of *Courier* (MWC-CMM.org/Courier), a Mennonite World Conference publication, to discover other examples of creative witness in the global Anabaptist community.



10

Resources for Intergenerational Events

1. Intergenerational storytelling

Everyone loves a good story. The practice of sharing stories across generations has been part of many family and congregational traditions. Stories can communicate our history and values, but they can also open us up to vulnerability and transformation.

Here is a simple intergenerational template for sharing a story from the Bible, Anabaptist history, or your own congregational history. Consider telling the story with children in the center of a circle surrounded by youth and adults. This could be done during a worship service or special event.

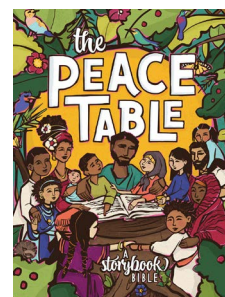
- a. Circle question: Begin with some questions as a way to introduce and engage the participants (e.g., for a story about baptism, start by asking, Where do you find water? How do you use water?).
- b. Biblical or historical story: Read or tell the story (e.g., the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, or your own story of baptism).
- c. Response to the story: Create a group activity to go deeper into the text and draw out additional questions or thoughts about the story (e.g., clay to shape a form or symbol, or perhaps a watercolor with dove cutouts).
- d. Provide opportunity for participants to share their activity and experience with the larger group (e.g., verbal sharing or simply hold up created items).
- e. Wrap up: Close the time together with a prayer, song, or meditation.

Recommended resources

- *Let the Children Come to Me: Nurturing Anabaptist Faith within Families* (Cascadia Publishing House, 2018). Written by Lisa Weaver and Elizabeth Miller, this book contains stories of sixteenth-century beginnings and contemporary global Anabaptists in thematic units around key Anabaptist values, including Scripture, prayer, non-violence, believers baptism, stewardship, community, worship. (amzn.to/46GJBaz)

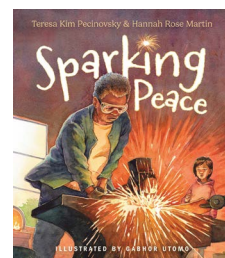
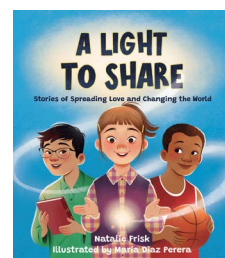


- *The Peace Table: A Storybook Bible* (MennoMedia and Brethren Press, 2023), written by Chrissie Muecke, Jasmin Pittman Morrell, and Teresa Kim Pecinovsky, provides beautiful pictures and wonderfully written Bible stories. (bit.ly/ThePeaceTable)
- *By Water: The Felix Manz Story* (Plough, 2022). A graphic novel by Jason Landsel that tells the story of Felix Manz, an early Swiss Anabaptist leader and one of the movement's first martyrs. (bit.ly/Ana500TK5)



Additional children's books from the Anabaptism at 500 project (forthcoming April 2025)

- *Stitched Together* by Aimee Reid invites readers to journey with the narrator as she pursues a secret wish—to add a square to her church's special anniversary quilt. Together with her church community, the young girl discovers the rich tapestry of connection woven into each quilt square and the power of shared stories. Illustrated by Kate Cosgrove. (bit.ly/Stitched-Together)
- *A Light to Share: Stories of Spreading Love and Changing the World* by Natalie Frisk encourages kids to discover and share their God-given gifts by introducing them to inspiring stories of Anabaptists. Meet sixteenth-century Anabaptist leader Conrad Grebel, modern-day peacemaker Issa Ebombolo, historian and podcaster Kate Bowler, and more! Kids and grown-ups will discover incredible stories of faith and gifts in action. Children will learn that when we lean into our gifts, a light flips on inside us, and this light can change the world. Illustrated by María Diaz Perera. (bit.ly/Light-To-Share)
- *Sparking Peace* by Hannah Martin and Teresa Kim Pecinovsky is an unlikely story of peace. Gentle and moving, this poetic tale illustrated by Gabhor Utomo offers readers a hopeful path in the face of gun violence and despair, showing kids how peacemaking can turn conflict into friendship and new beginnings—and forge guns into garden tools. (bit.ly/Sparking-Peace)



2. Intergenerational cooking lesson

Organize an intergenerational event bringing together people of all generations around tables to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of Anabaptism through the experience of cooking and sharing a meal together.

- Before the event, choose a special meal or food to celebrate the anniversary depending on your group's traditions and cultural contexts. You might consider looking through cookbooks offered by Herald Press such as *The Cherished Table*, *The Homestead Cook*, *Comfort Baking*, *Mennonite Family Recipes*, or *Simply in Season*. (bit.ly/Ana500TK6)
- Table groups:** It is important that table groups are intergenerational. If participants have registered, create groups before the event, or assign colors to each generation, with the goal of having all the colors present at each table.
- Have different tables prepare different recipes (i.e., salad, dessert, main dish). An adult at the table could share about the significance or history of the dish they are



preparing, or could share about a family experience or memory associated with it. Consider choosing dishes that do not take a long time to prepare (don't choose a six-hour roast recipe!).

- d. While you are waiting for the meal to be ready to eat, take time to engage in discussion about the history of Anabaptism and your congregation's or family's connection to the central themes of the Anabaptist movement.
- e. Share in the meal together.

3. Intergenerational game night

Have a game night playing all your favorite Anabaptist games. Some possibilities include the following games:

- a. Dutch Blitz—consider playing the jumbo cards lawn version for more fun.
- b. Crokinole—this game is said to have originated from Amish or Mennonite communities in Canada.
- c. Martyr: Bloody Theater 1528—a modern board game created by John Ratigan set in the 1500s where players scheme to subvert the state church's effort to establish full political supremacy. (bit.ly/Ana500TK7)
- d. Anabaptist history quiz game—create a digital slide presentation or quiz about Anabaptist history.

4. Other intergenerational activities

- a. Musical or play about Anabaptist history
- b. Movie night: Show a movie about Anabaptist history (see "Media Resources for Worship, Sunday School, or Other Events," [p. 78](#), for several ideas).
- c. Hymn or music event: Choose Anabaptist hymns and songs from the sixteen century to the present. *Voices Together* has dozens of songs that reflect the current cultural diversity of Anabaptist music.
- d. Create special baptism certificates on parchment paper for your congregation to highlight baptisms in the 2025 commemoration year and beyond.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



11

Media Resources for Worship, Sunday School, or Other Events

The internet is full of resources (of varying quality) that could be helpful as you make plans to commemorate Anabaptism at five hundred years. Here are a few options to consider:

1. Feature movie on the life of Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and the early Anabaptist movement

Zwingli: The Reformer, directed by Stefan Haupt, is a feature-length movie that was a box office success in Switzerland when it was released in 2020. It tells the story of Ulrich Zwingli, people's priest at the Grossmünster in Zurich, who led the Swiss Reformation. Though the narrative focuses on Zwingli, the movie offers a sympathetic and mostly fair portrayal of the early Anabaptist movement.

The Swiss Reformed Church has generously created a sublicensing agreement for anyone interested in showing the movie as part of the Anabaptism at 500 events. To receive the password, you will need to contact Marc Bundi, coordinator for Interreligious Relations for the Reformed Church of the Canton on Zurich, at Marc.Bundi@zhref.ch and sign a licensing agreement. The movie is subtitled in English. Note: The film includes a graphic depiction of martyrdom and one somewhat suggestive sexual scene. (For more information, see [imdb.to/4coKV3c](https://www.imdb.to/4coKV3c).)

2. Mennonite World Conference Transmission series

Transmission is a series of ten-minute video productions leading up to the year 2025. Each of the videos grapples with issues faced by Anabaptist Mennonites in a specific context, giving voice to young adults from five continents. A study guide is also available for each video.

Transmission 2020 Ethiopia (bit.ly/Ana500TK43); study guide available at bit.ly/Ana500TK10

Transmission 2021 Indonesia (bit.ly/Ana500TK11); study guide available at bit.ly/Ana500TK12

Transmission 2022 Latin America (bit.ly/Ana500TK13); study guide available at bit.ly/Ana500TK14

Transmission 2023 Migration (bit.ly/Ana500TK15); study guide available at bit.ly/Ana500TK16



3. Mennonite World Conference year in review

2022: In 2022, we found new ways to follow Jesus together across barriers. We crossed barriers of travel restrictions and distance to come together for our Assembly in 2022. We crossed national church barriers to meet together, encounter new partners, and make decisions by consensus in 2022. We crossed barriers of time and space to love our neighbors in the name of Christ. We crossed barriers of inequality by providing teaching resources. We find strength to follow Jesus best when we follow Jesus together. (Video available at bit.ly/Ana500TK17.)

2023: The focus of Mennonite World Conference in 2023 was on strengthening relationships in our Anabaptist-Mennonite family. We are family, woven together and strengthened as one body of Christ. Sharing joy and sorrow, together we are following Jesus, living out unity, and building peace. (Video available at bit.ly/Ana500TK18.)

2024: [forthcoming]

4. Mennonite World Conference Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday worship resources

2022: Following Jesus Together (bit.ly/Ana500TK19)

2023: Jesus Christ: Our Hope (bit.ly/Ana500TK20)

2024: Mosaic: Becoming a Part of God's Bigger Picture (bit.ly/Ana500TK21)

2025: [forthcoming]

5. The story of Anabaptism in South Korea

“Seek Peace and Pursue It: Sprouts of Anabaptism in S. Korea” (bit.ly/Ana500TK22; study guide available at bit.ly/Ana500TK23).

6. A brief history of Mennonite missions to Argentina (in Spanish)

Two Argentinian anthropologists, fascinated by the decolonized approach to mission practiced by Albert and Lois Buckwalter in the Chaco, created a video documenting their research that tells this story in Spanish: *Etnógrafos Viajeros. Crónicas de Investigación*, by Agustina Altman and Alejandro López. (Video available at bit.ly/Ana500TK24.)

7. Documentary on the immigration of a Low German Mennonite family from Belize to Peru

Although this documentary is not always accurate in its understanding of the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, it offers an intimate window into the life of a Low German Mennonites and the quest to flee the encroachments of modernity.

Mennonites: Life in the Ultra-Conservative Christian Colonies of South America is roughly fifty minutes long. (Available at bit.ly/Ana500TK25.)



12

Resources for Self-Guided Anabaptist History Tours of Switzerland

On May 29, 2025, Mennonite World Conference will host a daylong event in Zurich, Switzerland, titled *The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500*. While many Anabaptists who are interested in attending that event may join organized tour groups, others may want to plan their own itinerary. The following resources offer ideas for visitors interested in following the Anabaptist story in its Swiss context. Although these references focus exclusively on Switzerland, the birthplace of Anabaptism, travelers may also want to consider visiting European Anabaptist sites in Germany, France, and the Netherlands.

1. Tour book series

Masthof Press has published a series of tour books by Samuel E. Wenger that provide useful and accessible information for anyone interested in a self-guided tour of Anabaptist sites in Switzerland.

- *Anabaptist and Reformed Walking Tours of the Cities of Zurich and Bern, Switzerland*, vol. 1, bit.ly/Ana500TK26.
- *A Tour of Ten Important Anabaptist and Reformed Sites in Rural Switzerland*, vol. 2, bit.ly/Ana500TK27.
- *A Tour of Ten Important Anabaptist and Reformed Sites in Rural Switzerland*, vol. 3, bit.ly/Ana500TK28.
- *A Tour of Fourteen Important Anabaptist and Reformed Sites in Rural Switzerland*, vol. 4, bit.ly/Ana500TK29.

2. A free guide about people and places in Switzerland

This digital resource is a guide to places and people who formed the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in Switzerland from the early beginnings until today.

- Markus Rediger and Erwin Röthlisberger, *Discover Anabaptism in Switzerland* (Swiss Mennonite Conference, 2018), bit.ly/Ana500TK30.



3. Top ten sites

Joanne Hess Siegrist prepared this list of ten sites outside of Zurich and Bern.

- Anabaptist cave near Bäretswil—a refuge for Anabaptists, ca. 1525–1650. (bit.ly/Ana500TK31)
- Trachselwald Castle—includes an Anabaptist prison. (bit.ly/Ana500TK32)
- Chüechlihaus of Langnau—built in 1530; heirlooms displayed. (bit.ly/Ana500TK33)
- Alttäufergemeinde Emmental—the oldest known Täufer church. (bit.ly/Ana500TK34)
- Täuferweg—Walking path leading from the Anabaptist spring in Merishausen to the Schleithem Museum. (bit.ly/Ana500TK36)
- Schleithem Museum—includes an early copy of the Schleithem Confession. (bit.ly/Ana500TK35)
- Anabaptist Trail in the Bernese Oberland. (bit.ly/Ana500TK37)
- *On the Trails of the Sumiswald Anabaptists*—walking trail in the Emmental highlighting Anabaptist sites. (bit.ly/Ana500TK38)
- Täuferversteck—built 1608; hiding place of refuge. (bit.ly/Ana500TK39)
- Emmental of Canton Bern, Switzerland—ancestral home of many Amish and Mennonites. (bit.ly/Ana500TK42)



13

FAQs

Why are we focused on 1525/2025?

Dynamic movements like Anabaptism never have “official” beginning points. But the first baptism of adults—conducted secretly in a private Zurich home on January 21, 1525—marked the symbolic beginning of the Anabaptist movement. Adult baptism became the most visible and offensive expression of Anabaptism, and a focal point for its criminalization.

Why do we often use the term *commemoration* rather than *celebration*?

There is much to celebrate in the Anabaptist movement and the gifts that it has passed along to the church and to society today. We hope that happens in 2025 and in the years to come. But because the beginning of the Anabaptist movement also marked a schism in the body of Christ, we have consciously chosen to use the term *commemoration* instead of *celebration*. We see this as one small expression of “right remembering.”

What about the term *Anabaptist*?

It’s complicated! The term *Anabaptist* (Greek: *Catabaptist*; German: *Wiedertäufer* = “re-baptizer”) originally emerged as a negative label imposed on the movement by its opponents who wanted to associate them with criminal behavior. The word *Anabaptist* associated the movement with a Roman law dating back to the fifth century that made re-baptism a crime, punishable by death. Those who were part of the movement insisted that the term was inappropriate since they were not “re”-baptizing. Because infant baptism was not a true baptism, they regarded their practice as baptizing correctly for the first time. Nevertheless, over time the label stuck, especially in settings outside of Germany, where the movement is usually identified as *Täufer* (baptists), or the Netherlands, where the term *Doopsgezinde* (baptism-minded) is quite common.

Today, the word *Anabaptist* continues to refer to the historical movement in the sixteenth century, but *Anabaptist* has also come to serve as an umbrella term for the many and varied groups (Amish, Hutterite, Mennonite, and others) that emerged out of the sixteenth-century movement and continue to emphasize themes such as adult baptism, discipleship, nonviolence, community, and service.

How is the Anabaptism at 500 project related to the global Anabaptist church?

In the fifty years between 1975 and 2025, the number of Anabaptists in the world has tripled, growing from 700,000 to 2.13 million, with nearly all of that growth occurring in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As the center of gravity of the church shifts from the Global



North to the Global South, the character and identity of the Anabaptist movement is clearly in the midst of a profound transformation.

The resources presented in this tool kit are directed primarily to groups in North America. But we hope that our motto of “Looking Back, Living Forward” will encourage thoughtful reflection on how the growth of the Anabaptist movement outside of Europe and North America can be a source of renewal and hope for everyone who is part of the Anabaptist movement today.

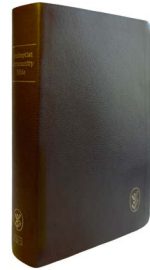
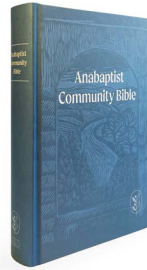


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