

## **RITUALS FOR RECONCILIATION AND HEALING**

Although Mennonite churches have a long tradition of prayers for healing and anointing with oil, these rituals have typically taken place in home or hospital settings. Much less frequently are congregations invited to participate in public services of prayers for healing.

In recent years a renewed interest in healing has encouraged new practices in healing prayer. A willingness to acknowledge brokenness and pain and a capacity for openness to the Spirit's transforming power are the foundation for prayers for healing. The following stories and rituals provide examples of ways groups and congregations have responded to our need for healing.

### **1. Prayers for Healing in Congregational Worship**

For more than a decade, Belmont Mennonite Church (Indiana) has included prayers for healing on a monthly basis in Sunday morning worship. Before the practice was adopted, the congregation engaged in a month-long biblical study of healing. Sermons were preached, and adult Sunday school classes discussed the sermon each week. At the end of the month, congregational leaders presented and received approval of a proposal for monthly prayers for healing.

The healing prayer ritual that has developed is very simple but meaningful. After the Sunday morning sermon, our congregation has a regular time for response to the sermon as well as sharing of joys and concerns. Once a month the sharing time is extended to include a healing service. Several elders and the pastors come forward to stand facing the front of the church. An invitation is extended for anyone to come forward who desires healing--spiritual, emotional, relational, or physical. An elder or pastor joins the person and prays for the concern. While the prayers are being offered, the congregation participates by standing to sing prayer-hymns which invite God's healing presence. Appropriate hymns include "Come, Ye Disconsolate" (HWB #497), "Shepherd Me, O God" (HWB #519), "Healer of Our Every Ill" (HWB #377), "There Is a Balm in Gilead" (HWB #627), "O Healing River" (HWB #372), "By Peter's House" (HWB #378) and many others.

In addition to prayers for healing, anointing with oil is also available to those who desire it. One of those leading the prayers always has oil available in a small container on the communion table (unscented olive oil is the preferred oil for anointing because it is nonallergenic). Those who want to be anointed go to that person and indicate their desire for anointing. The elder or pastor then anoints them and prays for them. Our congregation occasionally includes anointing with oil as part of communion services as well. The ancient Christian church recognized the healing presence of Christ in bread and wine and spoke of them as "medicine" for body and soul.

In addition to these public prayers for healing, persons desiring healing may also meet privately with the healing team. Consisting of pastoral leaders and other persons in the congregation committed to the ministry of healing, the team is available to meet on an ongoing basis with individuals who need additional support and assistance.

Although some of the people at Belmont were skeptical regarding the idea of healing prayer in the beginning, the entire congregation now appreciates the ritual and would not want to relinquish the practice. Teenagers as well as adults of all ages (and sometimes children) regularly come forward for healing prayer. Sometimes people experience dramatic healings; more often people are sustained by the presence of Christ and receive courage to face their ongoing struggles.

What is always present is the congregation's loving support and continuing commitment to hold one another before God.

Other resources for healing prayer can be found in the Mennonite *Minister's Manual*, edited by John Rempel (Faith & Life Press and Herald Press, 1998).

*Marlene Kropf*  
*Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana*

## 2. A SERVICE OF HEALING FOR A CONGREGATION

After the painful loss of a pastoral couple and a time of conflict resolution and healing, the Lombard Mennonite Church, Lombard, Illinois, participated in the following service. Interim pastors Gerald and Martha Smith Good, along with other congregational leaders, planned and led the service which took place on a Sunday morning in May, 1999.

### HERE WE ARE! A Service of Healing and Moving On

Hymns for gathering

Music for meditation

Call to Worship

We gather as pilgrims on a journey of faith.

**We come seeking the cloud of your presence,  
and your pillar of fire,  
as we travel on an uncharted course.**

*Shine in our hearts, O God,  
with the light of your love.*

*Make your presence known  
through Jesus the Christ, our Healer,  
and our Redeemer. Amen.* (adapted from #661)

Invocation Prayer

Hymn of Praise "I stand amazed in the presence" #528

Choir "Set My Feet on Solid Ground"

Scripture Reading Mark 5:21-34

Sharing our prayer concerns

Offering

Sermon "Reach Out, Be Healed"

Hymn of Response "Oh, have you not heard" #606

Opportunities for Healing (see below)

Hymn for the Journey "Come, come, ye saints" #425

Litany and tree planting outside: A recognition of "Here We Are!" (see below)

### Opportunities for Healing and Moving On

**Prayer Flags:** On a table in the foyer you will find fabric on which you may write a prayer for yourself or the congregation. It may be a petition, a confession, or a prayer of praise. These flags will be hung in the sanctuary and will remain as a reminder that God's Spirit continues to move among us. The idea of prayer flags, which are an ancient religious tradition, is that as the flags wave in the breeze, our prayers are carried to God. Prayer flags were chosen for today as one way to symbolize our intention of moving on and of claiming the presence and guidance of God's Spirit as we journey into the future.

**Anointing with Oil:** Two persons will wait at the front of the sanctuary to hear your requests for healing around the pain of the past. You are free to state your wish with the understanding that your request will be kept in strictest confidence and that a special prayer will be offered on your behalf along with anointing with oil.

**Letting Go:** A paper is available at the back of the sanctuary where you may write whatever it is that you wish to release. Or, if you wish, you may write on the back of this insert. A shredder is there for you to shred your written material symbolizing your letting go of whatever you have written. It has been suggested that this waste can be put into the earth where the tree is being planted.

**Hand washing:** A basin and water are available if you choose to wash someone's hands as a symbol of a reconciled relationship.

**Litany for Tree Planting**  
by Martha Smith Good

On the third day God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it." It was so, and God saw that it was good. God provided hospitable land, fertile soil, water and sunshine. The vegetation grew and it was good.

Many years later a vision was born to grow a Mennonite congregation in Lombard. God watched over planting a tree in Lombard, Illinois, and it was good. LMC's tree has been standing and growing for almost 50 years. This tree has flourished, it has languished, it has experienced wounding, and it has grown -- producing fruit. This tree has gathered scars but it has not died, and it is good. This tree has been well rooted in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it has been like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It did not fear when heat came. Its leaves have remained green. It has been a tree yielding its fruit in its season. Its leaf has not withered.

Today we plant this tree to symbolize that God is about to do a new thing among us. We will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst in song before us, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. We will be a tree of life to those who embrace us; those who become a part of us will be blessed.

As the tree lives in harmony with the earth, so may this tree demonstrate our desire to be in harmony with God and with each other. As this tree is planted with its imperfections, so may we recognize our own imperfections and commit ourselves to nurture each other as we also nurture this tree.

*Gerald and Martha Smith Good  
Lombard Mennonite Church  
Lombard, Illinois*

### 3. A Service of Closure and New Beginnings

When a marriage dies, the rejected and bereaved partners are often left alone without the comfort and support they need to overcome their pain. It is difficult for them to face the future with hope. At Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona, where Peter Wiebe and Stan Shantz were pastors in 1989, the following service marked the end of a broken marriage and opened the way for healing and hope.

A visual focus for the service was a banner with a rainbow and butterflies hung on the wall behind the pulpit. An altar cloth with the same symbols covered the communion table; on the table were a unity candle and several smaller candles.

The evening service was held at the church three days after the court proceedings dissolving the marriage. Though most of the people present had never attended a service like this one before, they came with openness and expectancy and were deeply moved and comforted by what happened.

#### Service

*"You will have the Lord for an everlasting light,  
and the days of your mourning will be finished."  
-- Isaiah 60:20*

Welcome and Invocation

Opening Hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father" #335

Scripture Reading Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Personal Reflections (given by the divorced spouse who spoke about her feelings of grief, disappointment, anger and apprehension about the future; she also remembered God's gifts in her marriage (her children) and spoke with gratitude of personal and spiritual growth that had occurred)

Symbolic Closure (From the central lit candle were lit two smaller candles, representing the children of the marriage; then the central candle was extinguished, symbolizing the end of the marriage)

Reading "Why Are You Weeping?" written by Nancy Meyers

Solo "Part the Waters, Lord"

New Beginnings Symbol (A broken piece of a cross was laid on the table, representing a desire for healing; while 2 Cor. 5:17 and Rev. 21:5 were read, a new cross was placed on the table)

Litany of Life (by Kathleen Johnson)

*My soul proclaims the greatness of God  
who is the Giver of Life.*

*My spirit sustains deep faith  
in God who is the Source of my life.*

*My being can nurture deep hope  
because God is Ever-Faithful.*

*I can risk love  
because God has looked on me with love  
and enfolded me in gentle arms.*

*I can dare to trust  
for I believe that God has never abandoned me.*

*I can rejoice  
because I have seen God dance  
in the sun, the wind, and the stars.*

*I can yearn to open myself to community  
and can build community with you, my brothers and sisters  
for I know that we are made in the image of God--  
a God that I believe in, hope in, trust in, and love. Amen!*

Paraphrase of Psalm 121

Paraphrase of Psalm 91

Solo "On Eagle's Wings"

A Time of Sharing (Words of affirmation, encouragement and love were offered)

Closing Hymn "Great is thy faithfulness" #534

Closing Prayer

*"For I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord,  
plans for peace, not disaster, reserving the future full of hope for you."*

Jeremiah 29:11

(For additional information about the planning process for this service, see "Is there healing for the brokenness of divorce?" by Jane Herstine Friesen in *Christian Living* (March, 1990).

**4. SERVICE OF LAMENT  
FOR A COUPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED A MISCARRIAGE**

**GENTLE SHEPHERD, COME AND HEAL US**

**Theme:** God walks with us in our grief.

**Purpose:** To support the couple as they grieve their loss and to assist them in healing.

**Worship Service:** This is a quiet service of laments, petitions, and recognition of anger, pain, and loss.

**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

1. The pastor will meet with the couple to discuss the service and decide whether they want to invite a group of friends or the larger community of faith.
2. The musicians will prepare the music. The couple may request specific songs to be sung or particular musicians to be involved.
3. Print the order of service. Plan to collect these after the service.
4. Purchase a stained glass angel.
5. If possible, prepare a space for the worship to take place in a circle.

**Call to worship**      There is a place of quiet rest (stanzas 2 and 3.).....5

**Invocation**            Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us .....352

Pastor: Using the words of the psalmist, on behalf of ..... and .....  
we bring our laments before God. We also express our own grief.

People: My soul melts away for sorrow;  
strengthen me according to your word. (Psalm 119:28)

How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
And have sorrow in my heart all day long? (Psalm 13:2)

Pastor: With my voice I cry to the Lord;

People: With my voice I make supplication to the Lord.  
I pour out my complaint before God;

Pastor:            I cry to you, O Lord.

People: Give heed to my cry,  
for I am brought very low. (Psalm 142:1,2,5,6)

### **Statements of sorrow, anger, and loss**

(The husband and wife make statements of their own feelings. They may choose from these possibilities or make their own.)

*God, I am overwhelmed with grief.*

*God, I do not understand why my child did not get a chance to live.*

*God I find it hard to accept that this child is dead.*

*God, life seems meaningless and empty.*

*God, I am angry that you let my child die.*

*God, I am angry at my husband/wife even though that is not rational.*

*God, I feel so helpless and that makes me angry.  
God, I am angry that people say such hurtful things even though I know  
they intend to be helpful.  
God, I keep blaming myself.*

*I grieve that I never had the chance to touch my baby.  
I grieve that I will never hear my baby's cry.  
I grieve that a part of my future has been taken away.  
I grieve that I never had a chance to hold my child and express our love.*

(The parents may want to invite the grandparents to make a statement of their sense of loss. This statement would be included here.)

(After each statement the congregation sings:

O Lord, hear my prayer.....348

**Petitions**

Pastor: In the words of the psalmist, we offer our petitions:

People: My eyes fail with watching for your promise;  
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"  
I am become like a wineskin in the smoke. (Psalm 119:82)

Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.

**Hymn of Petition** Healer of our every ill (stanzas 1 and 4) .....377

**Assurance of God's love and healing**

Pastor Your steadfast love, O Lord,  
extends to the heavens.  
With you is the fountain of life;  
In your light we see light.

## **Confidence in God's love and healing**

Parents        You are indeed my rock and fortress;  
                  you have seen my affliction;  
                  you have taken heed of my adversities.

Blessed be the Lord,  
who has shown steadfast love for me.  
I had said in my alarm,  
"I am driven from your sight."  
But you heard my supplications. (Psalm 31: 3,21,22)

Pastor         Nothing can replace the loss of your child.  
                  But we are confident that God will wipe away your tears  
                  and walk with you in your grief.  
                  As a reminder of all that has happened here  
                  and as a symbol of God's love and of our love for you,  
                  We give you this gift (present the angel to the couple).

**Hymn of confidence and hope** In heavenly love abiding.....613

### **Closing prayer of blessing**

( The pastor may want to embrace the couple during this prayer.)  
Compassionate and loving God, Refuge and Healer, we seek your blessing  
on ..... and .....  
As a mother takes her children into her arms and rocks and comforts them,  
so encompass ..... and .....with your gracious healing love.  
Walk with them in their grieving.  
Heal their sorrow.  
Strengthen their faith for each tomorrow.  
Grace each one here with solace from above  
that we may be your hands of healing love.  
Increase our gratefulness for life you give.  
And may our gratitude be seen in how we live. Amen

*Bertha Landers, Ontario*

*Excerpt from manuscript, **Through Laughter and Tears the Church Celebrates***

## 5. TAKE BACK THE NIGHT RALLY

EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY  
Discipleship Center, 21 March 1999

### A Service of Healing

#### Greeting

*(The assembly will respond after each greeting with, "And also with you.")*

May the God of all creation be with you.

May the God of peace be with you.

May the Compassionate One,  
who feels our pain and cries with us in our passion,  
be with you.

May the Just One,  
who rages with us against the injustice of our experience,  
be with you.

#### Hymn

Here, O Lord, your servants gather (stanzas 1, 2, 3)

7

#### Sculptures of Joimen Lee Cascano, Havana, Cuba

*[These sculptures were based on a Cuban legend of a powerful man who could seduce and entrap women, some of whom escaped, others of whom died. Those who escaped held their hands and some object high over their heads in victory. This posture of hands held high and leaning in toward the center was used several times in the ritual.]*

#### Opening Prayer

Mothering Presence  
enfold me  
unfold me  
and walk with me  
and walk with me.

I need to turn to you.  
I need to walk with you.  
I need to rest in you.

Beloved, come to me  
but not to win my wars.  
Beloved, come to me  
but not to make my peace.  
Come, O Loved One,

but not to build my house.

If only you will walk with me.  
If only you will be with me.  
If only you will shelter me.

Maker of Arithmetic  
Weaver of number-worlds  
Redeemer of equalities  
Mother of odd/Sister of even  
Creator of Aleph/Author of Bet:

If only you will walk with me.  
If only you will shelter me.  
If only you will be with me.  
(from the *Preparatory Service for the Days of Awe*)

[silence]

Tender God,  
you have seen my affliction,  
and unbound my eyes;  
you have bereaved me of the burden  
to which I used to cling;  
you have woven my pain  
into patterns of integrity;  
the wounds I cherished  
you have turned into honors,  
and the scars I kept hidden  
into marks of truth.  
You have touched me gently;  
I have seen your face and lived.

(from Janet Morley, *All Desires Known: Prayers Uniting Faith and Feminism*. Morehouse-Barlow, 1988.)

From the Psalms

*[The following sentences from the Psalms were read by several voices. When the list was completed, the people were invited to read aloud any of them they wished, as often as they wanted, and in whatever order – which created a wonderful texture of impassioned voices.]*

Surely there is a God who judges the earth.

How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?

Lord, where is your steadfast love of old?

We have had more than enough of contempt!

You have fed us with the bread of tears.

O God, do not keep silence!

Will you forget me forever?

I have come into deep waters.

Save me from all my pursuers.

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.

O that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest!

Guard me as the apple of your eye;  
hide me in the shelter of your wings.

Hymn

Give to the winds thy fears

561

Poem

Each of you, a bordered country,  
Delicate and strangely made proud,  
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.  
Your armed struggles for profit  
Have left collars of waste upon  
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.  
Yet today I call you to my riverside,  
If you will study war no more.

(Maya Angelou)

Ritual for the Journey

*[About 25 colorful Central American type shoulder bags of a small size had been made and were arranged as a visual center. The image here was the distinction between luggage (needed for a journey) and baggage (extra and unneeded weight). Paper and pencil were provided, and people were invited to write down something about their luggage and baggage. Working with at least one other person, they talked about what baggage could be surrendered and destroyed, and what luggage was desired. This interaction lasted for about 25 minutes – with a wonderful combination of laughter and tears.]*

Hymn

There is a balm in Gilead

627

Prayer of Blessing

May the power of God this day enable me,  
the nakedness of God disarm me,  
the beauty of God silence me,  
the justice of God give me voice,  
the integrity of God hold me,  
the desire of God move me,  
the fear of God expose me to the truth,  
the breath of God give me abundant life.  
AMEN

(from Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*)

[After the blessing, we sang "There is a balm" for a while longer.]

*Ken Nafziger*  
*Eastern Mennonite University*  
*Harrisonburg, Virginia*

## 6. PEACE VIGIL

When a well-known community member was murdered one evening as she closed up the pharmacy where she worked, the entire town was shocked and horrified by the violence (only the third murder in 23 years). Lauren Martin, pastor of Glenwood Springs Mennonite Church (Colorado) found himself profoundly disturbed. Wanting to do something to keep their town a safe place to live and also to speak out about peace, Lauren invited two pastor colleagues (one Lutheran, one Methodist) to join him in planning a Peace Vigil.

On the one-week anniversary of the murder, a candle lighting service was held at 9:30 pm (the approximate time of the murder) outside the store where the murder had occurred. About 75 persons gathered to tell how their lives had been touched or changed by acts of violence. People spoke of loved ones who had been victims of violent acts as well as stories from other places around the world.

Following the stories and laments, the pastors led in prayer and invited those present to pray. People were encouraged to express their anger to God. One person led a "cleansing prayer" asking God to wash away the blood, fear, and the spirit of violence from that place. Another asked God to restore and rebuild hope and peace in that place. One of the pastors passed around a shawl-sized piece of cloth, which everyone touched or put on their shoulders. Then the cloth was tied to a pole as a symbol of cleansing.

The purpose of the vigil was to recognize pain and brokenness in the community and then begin to repair what was damaged and rebuild hope.

Adapted from "Murder and Peace in Glenwood Springs" by Lauren Martin in *The Echo* (November/December 1998).

## 7. Ritual of Anointing for Vision: Healing and Hope

In many settings – local and churchwide, worshipers gather around the themes of the Mennonite denominational vision statement, Vision: Healing and Hope. When a particular session focuses on the "healing" piece of the vision, an appropriate worship ritual may include anointing with oil. The following service has been used in several ACT Weekends (teacher training events) as well as in a variety of congregations

Piano prelude "By Peter's house" 378

Call to worship Psalm 103:1-5

Leader Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless God's holy name.

People Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all God's gifts:

Side 1: who forgives all your sin,

Side 2 who heals all your diseases,

Side 1 who redeems your life from the Pit,

Side 2 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Side 1 who satisfies you with good as long as you live

Side 2 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

ALL Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless God's holy name.

Hymns "O bless the Lord, my soul"	80
"Asithi: Amen"	64
"Oh, for a thousand tongues"	110

Gospel reading Mark 1:21-39

Hymns "By Peter's house"	378
"O healing river"	372

Meditation (focuses on our brokenness and need for healing, Jesus' ministry of healing, and the call to each of us to become part of Christ's healing work in the world)

Anointing ritual

Three cloth-covered round tables are set up in three locations -- usually two in the front and one at the back of the room; on each table is a lit white candle, a small clear glass dish with oil in it, and several sheets of paper on which has been printed these words:

*"May Christ, the Healer, restore you,  
body, soul and spirit;  
and may Christ make you  
a healer in the world."*

Invitation to receive anointing

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn "Healer of our ev'ry ill"

377

While the hymn is sung, persons come (as they choose) to a table;  
one person holds hands outstretched, and the other makes the sign  
of the cross in oil on the other's palms;

while marking the first hand, the person says:

*May Christ, the Healer, restore you, body, soul and spirit,"*

and while marking the other hand, the person says:

*"May Christ make you a healer in the world."*

(These words are printed on small slips of paper and  
located next to the container of oil so persons do not  
need to worry about remembering the words.)

Then the person who has been anointed offers anointing to the other person; they  
return to their seats and make way for others.

Prayers for healing in the world

After the hymn, "A Touching Place," HSS 929 is sung (by the congregation or by an  
ensemble), prayers of intercession are offered for healing in the world.

Blessing and dismissal

*Marlene Kropf  
Elkhart, Indiana*