

WEEK OF PRAYER 2019

Pray across Canada
January 27 - February 3, 2019



#cdnmbpray



Artwork for the Week of Prayer provided by **Martie Giesbrecht**

Martie Giesbrecht is an artist who loves to paint. Besides opportunity to learn and grow, painting also provides relief from stress and the chronic pain she has lived with for more than 16 years. Martie, her husband, and two daughters are part of Forest Grove Community Church, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

"I see my creativity and artistic abilities as a God-given talent. I am very thankful for it; it is one small way I feel a connection with God. I am also very grateful for the support of my wonderful husband, daughters, family, and friends.

"It's been a humbling and amazing experience to completely trust God to use me to paint these images. I start to paint without a plan in mind, just praying to be used by the Holy Spirit. How beautifully God has been answering those prayers. My faith has grown through this process."

DAY 1

The best example



Anguish of the soul

by Martie Giesbrecht



Claudia Avila Contreras is from Bogotá, Colombia. A 2016 student at the Matthew Training Center

in Guadalajara, Mexico, she returned in 2017 as a leader in training, then spent seven months in Panama serving with the Wounaan people. Claudia is drawn to discipling youth in a cross-cultural context and ministering as a peacemaker in her own country.

Article translated by Joan Godard.

reflect

"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10).

Love's strength carries us through the deepest moments humans experience. This love that Jesus gives to us is the strongest force in the universe.

Jesus, who is most important to me, became a man in order to put himself in my place. That makes Jesus my best example of living in love and unity with others.

One night, while I was soundly asleep, my ears awakened to screams of pain – soul pain. I thought I was dreaming, but the cries became more intense and agonizing with each passing moment. Two sisters who were victims of violence and inequality were receiving some news that would change their lives.

I jumped from my bed and considered what my posture would be, knowing that indifference is never the adequate response.

I took the sisters' hands and held them with all my strength and looked attentively into their eyes. A sense of unity came alive in me. Even though I didn't know how to act in that difficult moment, I knew it was the right thing to express love in the manner that Jesus does.

I couldn't put myself in their shoes, but I didn't want to let go of their hands. I understood the great value it was, as part of the body of Christ, to fill these sisters with an intense love that even has the ability to heal horrible wounds.

That happened several months ago. When I visited the family a few days ago, I was reminded that I am still learning the value of unity, a church that loves sincerely, and – above all – hope.

activate

How are we loving the church? How do we practise unity in the body of Christ? Do we understand our roles as members of his body?

Without love, holding another's hands doesn't really help soul pain. Uniting ourselves to others as they experience deep wounds, trying to see as Jesus does, is what we should practise, no matter how difficult it is.

Our difficulties are the substance that produces eternal glory far beyond all comparison. For what is seen is temporary, but the unseen realm is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:10–18).

DAY 2

Unity amid diversity



Unity in Christ

by Martie Giesbrecht



Yoshifumi Tanaka is vice-chair of ICOMB (the International Community of Mennonite Brethren) and president of Nihon Menonaito Burezaren

Kyodan (the Mennonite Brethren conference in Japan).

activate

- How can we build up unity in our church community?
- Even though we are diverse, how can we respect each other?
- How can we share the Kingdom of God in our society?
- Who are members of “the body”?

pray

Father, help us to discern how to balance our individuality with our participation in the group. Help us, Lord, to seek the unity of the Spirit through the gifts of our diversity.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

reflect

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:4–5, NRSV).

It is a black joke in Japan that “if everyone crosses the street against the light, then there’s nothing to be afraid of.” This means that there’s no reason to feel guilty about doing something bad if everyone else does it.

I live in a strongly group-oriented society, so that sometimes my own opinion gets lost or I get confused about my own opinion.

Which is more important, an individual or a group? There is no right answer. It depends on the context and situation.

But I would like to ask how one develops harmony in a church community that is diverse. This is a very difficult question in our global, multicultural world.

The apostle Paul argues that we are one body; individually we are members one of another. Our challenge is to learn how to express unity and diversity in our church community and in our society.

DAY 3

Time in the Word

reflect

"Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6,7 NET).

Many of us pastors in Thailand use this passage. We use it to teach and disciple new believers about the importance of unity and fellowship of the body of Christ. Most of our believers are first-generation Christians.

The first thing we must remember is what our identity is in Christ.

We are new creations in Christ, and we are invited to die to self. We are slaves to the greater purposes of God for us.

This makes us open to instruction and correction from our spiritual leaders. As we posture ourselves in humility, we are able to treat each other in the church the way God treats us: with love and gentleness.

In my own life, as I waited on God years ago, the Lord spoke to me to forgive my ex-husband for his infidelity and for abandoning my children and me with no money to support ourselves.

God showed me a picture of his hand holding my two children and me safely. God spoke to my heart to trust



him and freely give because he would freely provide all my family needed. As I began to walk in this truth, I was able then to love and live in harmony with my brothers and sisters in the church.

We receive blessing from God, in order to bless others and multiply his good news of the Kingdom and for the sake of the lost. As the church is one, we are able to be a blessing to the world around us.



Ajaan (Thai for pastor) Naat is the conference leader for the Mennonite Brethren conference in Thailand. She

wrote this article with translation help from Karen Huebert-Sanchez.

Awakening
by Martie Giesbrecht

activate

Time spent alone with God in the Word, listening to his voice is the key foundation for growing in God.

Often, we depend on a good sermon and worship time at church to feed us. This alone will not produce a strong foundation in our spiritual lives.

We must set aside time each day to sit quietly with God, read Scripture, and tune our ears to hear God's direction and guidance for our day and our future.

DAY 4

Diversity in the body of Christ



Praise God
by Martie Giesbrecht

reflect

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

From the island of Patmos, the beloved disciple of Jesus sees a beautiful vision of heaven where a great multitude from all people groups from four corners of the world gathered in front of the throne.

Who are they? What is the prerequisite to go there?

They are all washed and saved by the blood of the Lamb (7:14).

Who sent them there?

It is the gospel that attracted and convinced them of their sin.

Church planters play a significant role in reaching unreached people groups and inviting them to be part of this group.

In India, Nagarkurnool District, Telangana State, there is an indigenous tribal group called Chenchu which is yet to be reached. Many of them live a traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle, away from technology, especially away from the Christ.

How can they be part of universal gathering in heaven unless the gospel is preached to them?

We have this calling to share the gospel where it has not been preached, so the great multitude in heaven will contain people from every nation, tribe, people, and language.



Rev. G. Ross is director and MB Church extension worker with Project Kalwakurthy.

activate

In our walk with God, let us examine ourselves. Are we spectators of the mission or are we partners in the mission of God?

As we begin the New Year, let us pray as the Mennonite Brethren global family for the mission of God among Chenchu people and pray for workers.

pray

Father, encourage and empower your people to share the good news with all peoples of the earth, whether near or far. Convict us of our sins and lead us into the way of salvation.

reflect

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

In June 2012, we went through a very hard time with the demise of our pastor, who was also my father-in-law. It was a heartbreaking experience for all of us to witness how, all of a sudden, a church was left without a pastor and we were left without our beloved dad.

Two weeks before he departed, he proposed that my husband and I become the new pastors of our local church. Unfortunately, he left without having our answer to his proposal.

We asked ourselves: What to do in a moment like this? What to do with all this heartache? And: What to do with the church?

Six months went on until we received a clear confirmation from the Lord to take the big step of faith to become the new pastors of our local church.

My husband and I sensed the voice of the Lord calling us to intentionally guide the church to a time of fasting, prayer, and seeking his presence. This practice kept going on for the next 12 months.

During that whole year, we witnessed how God sustained the church and kept the church strongly united. Both the church and we as pastors were greatly strengthened by God through these spiritual disciplines.

It is such a beautiful thing to experience true unity and love among our brothers and sisters, especially after going through tough moments stained with pain and sorrow.

We are sure that God used a time of affliction to refine and greatly improve unity among us. Furthermore, the Word of God encourages us to persevere in prayer and communion with one another. So, we are more than invited to be intentional in this point!



Ada and her husband Efraín Mencia are pastors serving at Iglesia Encuentro Cristiano (a Menonite Brethren church) in Asunción, Paraguay. They are parents of three amazing children: Maira, Matías, and Tobías.



activate

Have you been through a time of loss in your community of faith? Let that experience take you to a new level of seeking God through fasting and prayer. The Bible contains many examples of how these spiritual disciplines provide renewed strength and unity to community.

pray

Father, help us during times of loss and pain to seek your presence. Please help us, Lord, to strengthen unity with one another. In times of loss, let us see opportunities to foster a stronger unity.

In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

reflect

"Now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in – a river that no one could cross" (Ezekiel 47:5).

God woke me up early in the morning and directed me to Ezekiel 47:1–6.

I heard God asking me, *where are you?*

It's pretty early to answer questions; can we skip this? I answered.

After all, I thought I was in the deep water.

God persisted.

On what have you set your heart? How do you choose to spend your time?

We left the question hanging as I went back to sleep. When morning arrived, I went to walk, went down to the river, opened the Bible to read this passage again.

When you go into the deep water, you won't stand anymore on your feet – you will be taken where the river takes you, I heard God say. Where I take you.

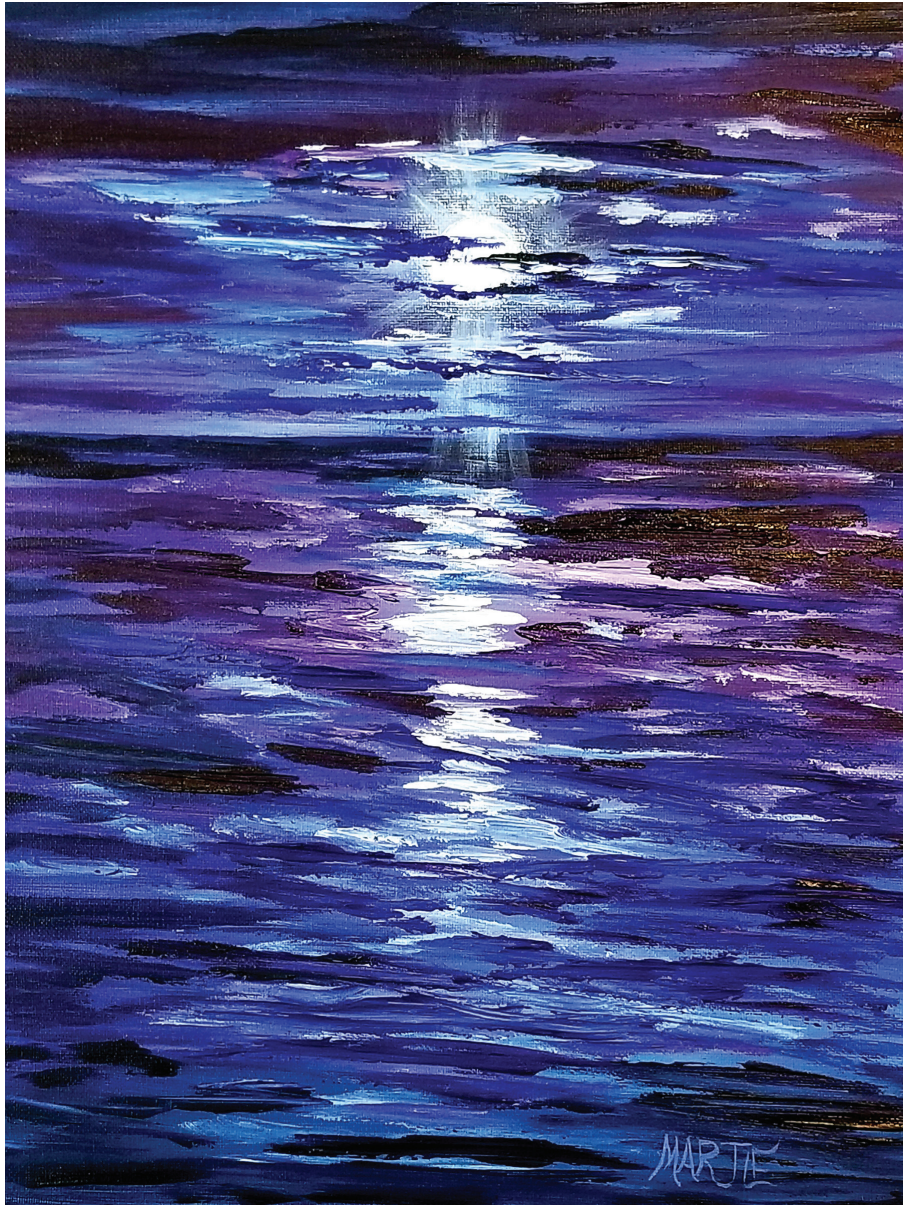
I started to think of the MB conference in Brazil where I am a leader.

I heard God say, *I want to have a conference that prays.*

Not just as single people, but as a whole church that goes into the deep waters.

Not as people who merely speak prayers, but who have a relationship, who spend time in silence hearing God.

I want to follow God deep into the river where I can't stand on my own feet, and I pray the church will come with me. May the river take us together where the God wants.



activate

So often God says, You are the answer to your prayers. Pick up the tools you already have and solve the problem.

As Canadians, you are good at brain work. God is calling you to open your arms. God's river flows to your heart, not to your head.

If what you have is being a hindrance, release it and give yourself to God's purposes. Then you will be in deep water. You will depend on him.

pray

May what God is putting into my heart transform me and flow out into the community around me.



Paul Dück is pastor of Boqueirão MB Church in Curitiba, Brazil. He shared these devotional reflections at Gathering 2018 in Saskatoon.

reflect

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20b–21).

Unity in the context of the local church is a gift of God and a responsibility – a witness – for Christians (John 17:21). The members of the church must work at it because the unity does not fall from heaven like manna.

As a pastor, I create the atmosphere of unity in the spirit of Acts 2:42–47.

Each week, I encourage each category of member to gather to read the Word and pray in small groups. This cultivates fellowship, dialogue, and trust.

When we worship on Sundays, we pray together for those who have celebrated birthdays, marriage, professional promotions during the week, and we visit those who are absent and sick. And like a weekly assignment, I suggest one family for whom the whole church will pray – right there on Sunday and again at home throughout the week.

At the end of the service, we greet each other in a circle, hand in hand. We talk a little before returning each one to his or her home.

In the case of suffering, especially, the church contributes to the funeral expenses and organizes the wake and funeral service, right up to the cemetery.

In these ways, we demonstrate unity in the body of Christ through our actions.



Mvwala C. Katshinga is an evangelist and trainer for the MB conference in DRC (CEFMC – *Conférence des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo*).

Articled translated by Karla Braun



Prayer Power

by Martie Giesbrecht

activate

- How does your church live out a sense of care for the joys and suffering of its members?
- How does your church respond to grief within the body?
- What practices foster fellowship, dialogue, and trust?

pray

Father, I pray for [choose a family or member of your congregation]. Thank you for their presence in our local gathering of the body of Christ. May they sense the guidance of your Spirit this week as they go about their work. Give them opportunities to speak to others of the hope they find in Jesus and through the church.