

# Many People - One Church

*By Henry Neufeld*

On Peace Sunday (November 10<sup>th</sup>) five metro Vancouver MCBC congregations gathered for a service of unity and a focus on peace:

- Chinatown Peace Church
- Peace Church on 52<sup>nd</sup>, host church
- Peace Mennonite in Richmond
- Point Grey Inter Mennonite Fellowship (PGIMF)
- Sherbrooke Mennonite Church

The idea for a joint service came from Janice Kreider at a regular church leaders meeting. The intent was to celebrate and worship together, to strengthen relationships between congregations, and to promote our Anabaptist commitment to peace. An inter church committee planned the event.

Working together is not new for these congregations; they jointly operate a refugee food bank based at Sherbrooke Mennonite church. Worshipping together is new; an important reminder that we are in this together. The offering went to support Mennonite Church Canada workers in the Philippines or could be designated to any participating congregations.

In welcoming worshippers, Pastor Lydia Cruttwell commented, *"This means that this service will have some parts that are familiar and some that are new... and that is a good thing."* *"It is good for us to... discover how we are similar and how we are different and to be reminded that we are all united in one body by Christ, the Prince of Peace."*

A new feature for some was the interactive discussion time following the sermon. Led by Rosie Perera, it's a regular part of services at PGIMF, allowing worshippers to respond and comment on the message.

The service, led by Chan Yang from PGIMF, featured Lydia Cruttwell as speaker, and a choir from several congregations. Scriptures were read in: English, Spanish, German, Korean, and Cantonese. *"Hearing the scripture read again and again allows me to take a moment to meditate on it, or perhaps it is the languages themselves, the reminder that the Kingdom of God embraces every tribe, tongue, nation, and people,"* said Cruttwell.

Using the Micah text *"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"* Cruttwell asked *"Is there peace?"* She noted the cessation of violence is only a first step. *"We cannot experience wholeness if we are suspicious or fearful of our neighbours,"* Cruttwell said.

In Micah's day the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. *"This got Micah mad,"* she said. *"Shalom includes the presence of justice and wholeness."* If we ask *"Is Canada at peace? Not by a long shot,"* answered Cruttwell. She said we benefit from the temporary labour of migrants who can't stay in Canada, we are killing God's creation, thousands die of opioid crises, elderly folk are scammed, and people work multiple jobs to pay rent and provide food.

But we don't give up. *"We are called to do justice – to defend the oppressed, to lift up the powerless, to make choices that help those in need... we are called to be people whose lives are marked by mercy and compassion towards friends, and family, and strangers and enemies,"* Cruttwell said.

We need to follow a high calling: "steadfast love." *"We are called to work for peace now; it will be a struggle but with Christ we can do it."* Her prayer was that we not settle for an absence of violence.

In the response time after the sermon, it was pointed out that veterans often hate war the most, that people can be hurt by "violence" from church leaders, the world is more peaceful today, and one questioner wondered how to become an agent of reconciliation.

Reaction to the service was positive; *"It was great, I can't recall the last time we were all together, we should do this more often."* *"Lydia is a gifted speaker."* *"It's important to recognize the different perspectives in Vancouver churches."* One lady said, *"I loved this, it brought back memories of when this church was this full every Sunday."* *"There was an 'extended family' feeling."* *"The discussion time after the sermon was wonderful."*

For some this service brought back memories of the golden era of church attendance when the pews were full every Sunday and chairs were placed in the aisles to accommodate everyone. That era is gone, as many churches dwindle in number. New wineskins will be needed.