

MennoLens

A tool for evaluating Christian resources with a Mennonite eye

Why evaluate?

Like all Christians, Mennonites face an increasingly competitive marketplace. Christian education resources are more readily available and aggressively promoted than ever before. How shall we decide which resources to purchase and use? Why is it vital that Mennonite teachers and leaders evaluate materials on the basis of their theology and overall message before selecting?

Simply put, careful critique of Christian study materials helps us examine what is most important about our faith, and what we want to pass on through our teaching. Mennonites have distinctive understandings about Biblical interpretation, baptism and church membership, community, and the importance of discipleship and peacemaking. Some Christian resources gloss over, avoid, or even blatantly contradict values that are very significant to Mennonites. It's likely that teaching and learning will be better focused if educational materials have been carefully and confidently selected.

This guide offers a quick overview of criteria to consider as you select Christian resources. Use it to help your congregation choose materials that will form and reinforce strong Anabaptist/Mennonite faith among your children, youth, and adults.

How to use this tool

- 1 Gather any Christian resources your church is considering, or currently using.
- 2 Invite those responsible for resource selection, or a group of leaders from your congregation, to meet for evaluation. Such a group might include pastors, elders, Christian educators, parents, or perhaps even college or seminary students with an interest in Anabaptist teachings or curriculum evaluation from a Mennonite perspective.
- 3 Discuss your purpose, and distribute copies of this evaluation tool.
- 4 Encourage the group to review the categories listed and to add any additional criteria unique to your own congregation. Then, using the categories and criteria listed, review the resources collected. You may choose to have each participant review a different chapter or session and report to the group, or all review the same material individually and then compare notes. Adjust the exercise to meet your own time and needs.
- 5 Share your results with one another as thoroughly as you can, using the recommendations listed below. If your group is charged with making a specific selection, make the decision in light of your findings. If possible, discuss and decide on appropriate ways to share your process and findings with the congregation.

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Recommendations:

- Yes
- Yes with reservations (be prepared to explain)
- No

Comments:



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Categories:

① Use of the Bible

- Short or specific texts are taken in context of the chapter, book, and Bible as a whole (i.e. proof-texting is avoided).
- The text uses a recognized Bible translation (NRSV, NIV) rather than a paraphrased version (The Message).
- Discussion and response activities grow out of the scripture text.
- The scripture text fits the theme comfortably and does not feel forced.
- The Bible story (if retold) is developmentally appropriate to the target age group.
- Direct use of and interaction with the Bible is encouraged.
- Bible memory is included.

Comments: _____

② Biblical Interpretation

- Biblical material is presented in a manner consistent with the teachings of the congregation and with *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.
- It is recognized that texts occur in particular cultural, political, and social contexts that may not be directly comparable to our own.
- God** is presented with a balance of characteristics (e.g. loving and fearsome, extending grace and judgment).
- Jesus Christ**, his teaching and life, as well as death and resurrection, becomes the lens through which we read the entire Bible.
- The **Holy Spirit** empowers and sustains us in faithful living.

Comments: _____

③ Ethics and Morality

- The content is consistent with Anabaptist values such as peace, mutual support, and simple living.
- Sin is presented as personal and corporate. It is defined as a break in relationships with God, each other, with our inner selves, and with creation.
- Salvation is presented in a way that assumes not only a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but also a new way of living both morally and ethically (More than a ticket to heaven or earning your way through good works).
- The content is consistent with our understanding of believers baptism that assumes that children are safely in God's care until they are able to make an informed decision (usually during the teen years).
- The materials apply the biblical text to everyday life.
- The content encourages us to examine and/or critique the bases of our attitudes, beliefs, and values.
- Illustrations of real people who have chosen a Christ-like way of living are included.
- The content encourages application of biblical principles to major social issues.
- The material motivates us to act and compels us to extend God's grace to others.

Comments: _____

④ Teaching Methods

- The focus of the session is clearly stated.
- Activities tie in meaningfully with the goal of the session.
- Materials engage the learners mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually through a variety of activities (e.g. movement, art, discussion, lecture, drama, music, and journaling).
- Supplies and teaching aids are easy to use and readily available.
- Learners are guided to discover key insights on their own (e.g. "fill in the blanks" or "right answers" are avoided) as they seek to understand and interpret the teachings of the church.
- Language and content are age and context appropriate but are not "dumbed-down" (the material assumes the leader and learners are intelligent and capable).
- Attention is paid to inclusive language (e.g. include he and she when referring to a person).

Comments: _____

⑤ Adaptability

- The material is flexible and adaptable to differing group sizes.
- There is enough material for the length of the session time.
- The materials are adaptable to urban, suburban or rural groups.
- Materials are adaptable to a variety of space needs.
- Materials can be adapted for multi-ethnic usage.
- Electronic media are appropriate for various contexts.

Comments: _____

⑥ Home Emphasis

- Materials draw parents and other adults into the learning process.
- Suggestions are given for practical home use or application.

Comments: _____

⑦ Worship Emphasis

- Various worship components are included (e.g. music, prayer, rituals).
- Spiritual practices for individual and corporate use are taught.

Comments: _____

8 Church, Culture, and World

- All people are affirmed and respected as children of God, regardless of race, religion, gender, or socio-economic standing.
- Narratives and illustrations avoid stereotypes.
- Stories and illustrations recognize the gender and racial/ethnic diversity of God's people.
- People with special needs are portrayed with sensitivity.
- Compassion for community and world are instilled; fear, suspicion, and hatred of the other are dispelled.
- A vertical relationship (me and God) is integrally connected with a horizontal relationship (me and others).
- Global and non-Western issues are included.
- A perception of national superiority is avoided.
- The impact of our faith practices and everyday choices on others, locally and globally, are considered.

Comments: _____

Additional notes or criteria:



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