



A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA

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1 **Desiring God’s Coming Kingdom**
2 **A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA**

3 Approved by the Executive Board – February 25, 2014
4

5 **Preface**
6

7 In 2011, through prayer and discernment, the Executive Board sensed that God was calling
8 Mennonite Church USA to move more deliberately toward fulfillment of our missional
9 purpose as a church. Since then, we have pursued this purpose through prayerful planning
10 that involves all parts of the church—congregations, area conferences, constituent groups,
11 and churchwide agencies. We expect that our national conference will continue to grow
12 and change as we seek to be faithful to God’s call.
13

14 This document outlines our most recent efforts to align our organizational plan with our
15 statements of vision, purpose and churchwide priorities. This plan reflects our
16 understanding that the delegates to the biennial assembly have ultimate responsibility and
17 authority to discern God’s call for our church. The plan should be widely discerned and
18 “owned” across Mennonite Church USA at the congregational, conference and national
19 conference levels. This update reflects the feedback from the 2013 assembly in Phoenix,
20 Arizona, as well as the milestones we reached in the 2011-2013 biennium.
21

22 One of the temptations in planning is to put humans, rather than God, at the center of the
23 plan. This prompted the biblical writer to warn: “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or
24 tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make
25 money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You
26 are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it
27 is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that,’” (James 4:13-15). Therefore, we
28 acknowledge that the implementation of this plan depends on God’s blessing and
29 enablement.
30

31 Since groups move in the direction of the questions they ask of themselves, we will seek to
32 address six overarching questions. We believe the answers to these questions will form the
33 basis for strong alignment among all entities in the church. They will also create the means
34 by which we can develop goals with strong ownership across the whole church.
35

36 The Executive Board guides the process of purposeful planning and decision making in
37 such a way that the planning process is clear across the entire church. If individual
38 delegates wish to give feedback to this plan, they may send an email to Ervin R. Stutzman,
39 Executive Director, at ErvinS@MennoniteUSA.org or send responses by post to
40 Mennonite Church USA, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

41 There are two parts to this plan. Part One describes what we mean by “missional church,”
42 and sets forth our vision for becoming a missional church in all that we do. It also provides
43 a theological, biblical and practical rationale for planning in Mennonite Church USA
44 between now and the year 2020, beginning with an exposition of our denominational
45 statements of vision, purpose, and priorities.

46
47 Part One addresses the following three questions.

- 48 1. Who is God calling us to become as a people?
- 49 2. Where is God calling us to go?
- 50 3. What are the signposts to show we are on God’s chosen path for us?

51
52 Part Two addresses the following three questions:

- 53 4. Where are we now on this journey?
- 54 5. What circumstances might cause us to make adjustments to our goals along the
55 way?
- 56 6. What are the next steps on the path?

57
58

59 **PART ONE** 60 **OUR MISSIONAL VISION**

61 62 **1. Who is God calling us to become as a people?**

63
64 *God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit,*
65 *to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace*
66 *so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.*

67

68 At our birth as Mennonite Church USA in July 2001, we adopted the above statement of
69 Vision: Healing and Hope as our best understanding of God’s intent for our present
70 existence as a church. It also points us toward a future rooted in God. God is the author and
71 source of who we are and who we have yet to become.

72

73 We believe that our purpose as a church is derived from the very nature of the triune God.
74 God the Father sent the Son—Jesus into the world. Together, the Father and the Son sent
75 the Spirit. Now, the triune God sends the church into the world to reconcile and restore it
76 in relationship to God’s good purposes. This is the basis for God’s call.

77

78 Jesus is the center of our faith. We claim him both as Savior and Lord. Just as God calls us
79 to believe in Jesus for salvation by grace through faith, God calls us to follow Jesus, to
80 become members of a new community and to invite others to join us on this journey. We
81 are invited to experience God’s love and care revealed in Jesus. In this way, we participate
82 in God’s loving purposes embodied in the Kingdom which Jesus announced and
83 inaugurated through his life, death and resurrection. The message of God’s kingdom comes
84 as a mustard seed or leaven in the world, gradually transforming our thoughts and actions.
85 Although it seems upside-down from a worldly point of view, it clearly demonstrates
86 God’s preferred way of living in the world. God intends that by our participation in the
87 community of those who are formed *by* and *for* the Kingdom, we will be healed and

88 infused with hope for ourselves and for the world. God intends that the church become a
89 sign, instrument and promise/foretaste of the kingdom of God.

90

91 Community is the center of our lives. Our life together as a church community
92 demonstrates God's intent for all people. God's call invites us into privileged status as
93 members of God's family, where we enjoy the love and care revealed to us in Jesus. The
94 church is not intended to be an inward looking community or a "passive receptacle" of
95 God's love. Rather, we are sent by God to bear witness in word and deed to the good news
96 that has come to us in Jesus Christ. We encourage and support the planting of new faith
97 communities that invite others into relationship with Jesus and kingdom life.

98

99 Reconciliation is the center of our work. We recognize that because of sin, all have fallen
100 short of the Creator's intent, marred the image of God in which we were created, disrupted
101 order in the world, and limited our love for others. Therefore, through the reconciling
102 power of Jesus Christ, we seek to walk in righteousness, or "right-relatedness" with God
103 and others. We are called into being as a church so that all people may experience the
104 healing and reconciling love of God that fills us with hope and empowers us to be agents
105 of God's peace. Therefore we exist as a church for God's apostolic initiative, demonstrated
106 through our witness in the world. By God's gracious initiative, our church is becoming
107 more fully the sign, instrument and foretaste/authentication of God's Kingdom in this
108 world.

109

110 Our vision statement makes it clear that despite our privileged calling to be God's
111 witnesses and signs of the kingdom, we are not the primary agents. Authentic witness to
112 the Kingdom is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us.
113 As Jesus reminds us, the Spirit exists to bear witness to Him. Just as the Spirit brings the
114 church into being (Acts 1:8), so too the church's witness in the world is made possible by
115 the witness of the Spirit through us. This does not mean that we are merely passive
116 receptacles of God's Spirit. We are called to be attentive to the work of the Spirit in the
117 world, and to an intentional engagement with the world so that we may join with the work
118 of God's Spirit.

119

120 The gift of the Spirit is given freely and without favor to empower every follower of Jesus for
121 their witness in the world. Our vision does not assume the witness of a select few who are
122 specially commissioned and set apart for God's work. Rather, our vision anticipates that the
123 whole people of God, including every member of every congregation of Mennonite Church
124 USA, will bear witness to God's healing and hope through Jesus Christ.

125

126 As the primary agent of witness in the world, the Holy Spirit guards the church against
127 pride (taking acclaim or receiving credit for any fruit that is borne), as well as fear (for
128 personal safety or worry about what we should say). Cultivating an awareness of the
129 Spirit's work invites us to increase the space in our lives for the Spirit to work. As we
130 attend to the work of the Spirit within and among us, we will grow as communities of
131 grace, joy and peace.

132

133 The goal of this transformation is "so that" God's healing and hope will not only
134 accomplish their transformative work in us, but also in the world. If God's healing and
135 hope are to connect with a broken and hurting world then it will require engagement with

136 that world. As followers of Jesus we will need to cross frontiers as he did in order to
137 engage with those whom he loves and seeks to heal.

138

139 **2. Where is God calling us to go?**

140

141 “Joining in God’s activity in the world, we develop and nurture
142 missional Mennonite congregations of many cultures.”

143

144 If we accept our identity as the sent ones of God, we will be compelled to discern those
145 places in our church and world that await the transforming power of Christ’s kingdom.
146 We will ask ourselves where God is calling us to go. That is the basis of the purpose
147 statement for Mennonite Church USA, shown above.

148

149 We believe that in the pursuit of this purpose, God is calling us to pay attention to seven
150 priorities in the life of our church over the next decade. As we attend to these priorities, the
151 Spirit will enable us to align our work with God’s purposes, so that we may become an
152 effective sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s kingdom.

153

154 *Christian Formation:*

155 This first and highest priority commits us to fashion and mold our lives after that of Jesus
156 Christ. As the sent One of God, Jesus sends us into the world. As missional communities,
157 our congregations, conferences, and agencies will ensure that people are invited to make a
158 commitment to Christ, disciplined in the way of Christ, taught to engage with the scriptures,
159 helped to develop Christian identity from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective, and given
160 the capacity to cultivate their vocational calling. (Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 8:28-30,
161 Colossians 1:28-29, 2 Timothy 1:5, Articles 17 and 18, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite*
162 *Perspective*).

163

164 *Christian Community:*

165 As a sign and foretaste of God’s coming Kingdom, our church communities serve as a vital
166 part of our witness in the world. As communities in God’s mission, we will strengthen the
167 loving interaction within the body of Christ and enhance our witness through worshipping
168 together, extending hospitality, practicing scriptural discernment, cultivating Christ-
169 centered unity and learning to agree and disagree in love. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14,
170 Colossians 3:12-17, Philippians 3:7, Articles 14 and 16, *Confession of Faith in a*
171 *Mennonite Perspective*).

172

173 *Holistic Christian Witness:*

174 The church exists for the task of bearing witness to the coming of Christ’s kingdom in the
175 world. As missional communities we will share the good news of Jesus Christ in word and
176 deed, help birth new communities of faith and reflect the reign of God by striving for peace
177 and justice. Our allegiance to Jesus Christ calls us to pacifism, being willing to die rather
178 than to kill even our enemies. The witness of congregations and the broader community of
179 faith is expanded through institutional ministries that carry a shared and specialized
180 mission on a collective basis beyond the capacity of any one congregation. (Matthew
181 12:15-21, Luke 4:18-21, John 20:21-22, Articles 10 and 22, *Confession of Faith in a*
182 *Mennonite Perspective*).

183

184

185 *Stewardship:*
186 In his words and practices, Jesus modeled an understanding that God is the Lord of all life.
187 Thus, we are called to be stewards of all that God has generously entrusted to us for the
188 sake of God’s purposes in the world. As missional communities we will assist every
189 participant in our congregations to cultivate a healthy whole-life stewardship, to care for
190 creation, to practice mutual aid and to be generous in ways which reflect the generosity of
191 God. (Psalm 24:1-2, Proverbs 22:6-7, Luke 19:1-10, 2 Corinthians 8:5-7, 13-15; 9:6-15,
192 Article 21, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*).

193
194 *Leadership Development:*
195 The church calls forth leaders as prompted by God to inspire the congregation for its
196 evangelizing mission in the world and to ensure that every member/participant in the faith
197 community is empowered, equipped and supported for their unique vocation in witness. As
198 missional communities we will develop leaders at all levels of the church, helping every
199 member to reach their God-given potential as they follow Christ’s call. (Exodus 18:13-23,
200 Ephesians 4:7-16, Article 15, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*).

201
202 *Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation:*
203 Racism, antipathy and alienation among different cultural groups stand in the way of
204 Christ’s kingdom of love, justice and peace. As missional communities we will seek to
205 dismantle individual and systemic racism in our church. We will also seek to develop
206 intercultural competence, which means that we intend to heal racial divisions, learn to live
207 and work in a multicultural context, and value all the gifts of God’s diverse people. We
208 envision people of many nations, tribes, people and languages as participants in the
209 kingdom of God. We believe it is Jesus, pictured as the Lamb, who calls people together
210 from all nations. (Acts 10, Galatians 3:25-29, Ephesians 2:15; Revelation 7:9, Article 9,
211 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*).

212
213 *Church-to-Church Relationships:*
214 The unity of Christ’s church is hindered when any particular communion remains
215 disengaged and isolated from others who belong to the same Body of Christ. In a world of
216 global economic disparity and vast cultural differences, our unity in the church bears
217 witness to an alternate reality where we share each other’s pain and rejoice when others
218 rejoice. As missional communities we will learn and grow through interaction with other
219 Christian fellowships. We will cultivate a particularly close relationship with Mennonite
220 Church Canada, since we share a common confession of faith, a common ministerial
221 polity, and many joint ministry ventures. (Ephesians 4:4-6, Revelation 5:9-10, Article 9,
222 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*).

223 224 **3. What are the signposts to show we are on God’s chosen path for us?**

225
226 One of the signs of a healthy church is that it helps bring forth new Christ-centered
227 communities. Although not all growth is a sign of good health, vigorous missional
228 churches bring forth new communities of faith in a variety of forms.

229
230 The following paragraphs describe twelve additional characteristics of missional churches,
231 adapted here from material first provided by the Gospel and our Culture network. Each
232 paragraph has a signpost to show what it might look like when a congregation or

233 community within Mennonite Church USA is on the path toward the destination to which
234 God has called us as a church.

235

236 1. *Missional character trait:* The missional church proclaims the Gospel.

237 *Signpost:* The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of
238 different ways.

239

240 2. *Missional character trait:* The missional church is a community where all members
241 are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.

242 *Signpost:* The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of
243 all.

244

245 3. *Missional character trait:* The Bible is normative in this church's life. It sets the
246 standard for our life as a people.

247 *Signpost:* The church reads the Bible together in the light of Jesus Christ under the
248 guidance of the Holy Spirit to learn God's good and gracious intent for all creation,
249 the way of salvation, and the identity and purpose of life together.

250

251 4. *Missional character trait:* The church understands itself as different from the world
252 because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.

253 *Signpost:* In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking
254 to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.

255

256 5. *Missional character trait:* The church seeks to discern God's specific missional
257 vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.

258 *Signpost:* The church has made its 'mission' its priority, and in overt and
259 communal ways is seeking to be and do 'what God is calling us to know, be, and
260 do.'

261

262 6. *Missional character trait:* A missional community is indicated by how Christians
263 behave toward one another.

264 *Signpost:* Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in
265 the locale characterize the generosity of the community.

266

267 7. *Missional character trait:* The members are engaged in a community that practices
268 reconciliation and embraces the diversity that God has created here on earth.

269 *Signpost:* The church community is moving beyond restricted cultural expressions
270 toward becoming a community that is more diverse in its racial, ethnic, age, gender
271 and socio-economic makeup.

272

273 8. *Missional character trait:* People within the community hold themselves
274 accountable to one another in love.

275 *Signpost:* Substantial time is spent with one another, building trust and holding
276 ourselves accountable to each other in love.

277

278 9. *Missional character trait:* The church practices hospitality.

279 *Signpost:* Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central
280 role.

281

- 282 10. *Missional character trait:* Worship is the central act by which the community
283 celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised
284 future.
285 *Signpost:* There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of
286 God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship
287 together.
288
- 289 11. *Missional character trait:* This community has a vital public witness.
290 *Signpost:* The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the
291 transformation of life, society, and human relationships.
292
- 293 12. *Missional character trait:* There is a recognition that the church itself is an
294 incomplete expression of the reign of God.
295 *Signpost:* There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere—
296 and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.
297

298 The description of the missional traits in the above list, and the comment that missional
299 churches bring forth new Christ-centered communities, relate directly to congregations.
300 Yet to some extent these comments are also true of other entities that make up Mennonite
301 Church USA. We are a network of congregations joined by a common set of core
302 convictions and commitment to an Anabaptist perspective on Christian faith. Along with
303 area conferences and other communities beyond the congregation, the national conference
304 exists to help congregations do what they could not do on their own. For this reason, we
305 might call the conferences and various organizations beyond the congregation “supportive
306 communities.” These communities include but are not limited to our Mennonite Church
307 USA churchwide agencies such as Everence, MennoMedia, Mennonite Education Agency,
308 Mennonite Health Service Alliance, Mennonite Mission Network, and *The Mennonite*.
309 They may also include other inter-Mennonite organizations such as Mennonite Central
310 Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, and Mennonite Economic Development
311 Associates.
312

313 The national conference works on behalf of the whole church in all its parts. It must seek to
314 represent the interests and needs of all the members, and provide for all parts to participate
315 in the whole. At the same time, the national conference should not attempt to do what can
316 be done more effectively at other levels of the church, i.e. the area conference, or
317 congregational level. Denominational leaders should focus primarily on strengthening the
318 church as a kingdom community with alternative allegiances and loyalties in the midst of
319 the world. On occasion, they are called to engage in political advocacy. This will have the
320 greatest credibility when this advocacy reflects the common mind of the church on an issue
321 and is supported by the experience and engagement of church members. Church leaders
322 should avoid partisan politics in the work of the church.
323
324
325
326

327 **PART TWO**
328 **THE PURPOSEFUL PLAN**

329
330 **4. Where are we now on this journey?**
331

332 On any journey of faith, it is helpful to stop and assess where we are in comparison with
333 where we want to be. In 2001, the delegates at Nashville 2001 adopted a document entitled
334 *Organizational Strategy, Culture and Structure for Mennonite Church USA 2001-2011*.
335 Now is the time to update our plans for the next decade of life together. First, we will
336 highlight some positive developments over the last decade and some issues that cause
337 concern.

338
339 Positive developments

- 340 • We have a growing vision and practice as a missional church.
- 341 • We know of 85 church plants or congregations that have been started or joined
342 Mennonite Church USA since January 1, 2008.
- 343 • Racial/Ethnic groups are experiencing numerical growth.
- 344 • The establishment of the Corinthian Plan provides health care for ministers.
- 345 • Our seminaries are increasingly making their programs available to people who
346 cannot come to campus.
- 347 • An increasing number of Christians are drawn to an Anabaptist vision of church.
348 Some are formally joining us.
- 349 • Many parts of the broader Christian church are on a journey of embracing Jesus’
350 way of nonviolence and are inviting Mennonite voices into their conversations
351 about war, peacemaking and seeking justice.
- 352 • Many of our young people are expressing their Anabaptist convictions by joining
353 new expressions of the church in house fellowships and discipleship movements.
- 354 • We have participated in formal services of repentance and responded to requests for
355 forgiveness from Swiss Reformed Church and Lutheran World Federation, with
356 desire for ongoing relationships.
- 357 • We have welcomed the Mennonite Convention of Puerto Rico as an associate
358 member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.
- 359 • We have seen the rise of a creation care movement with strong support from youth
360 and young adults.
- 361 • Our church-related health and human services ministries bring healing and hope
362 into the lives of thousands of individuals and families (our neighbors) across the
363 country every year.
- 364 • Agencies such as the Mennonite Mission Network, Everence and MHS Alliance
365 are building strong ecumenical relationships in their work.
- 366 • Agencies such as MennoMedia have ministered effectively to the broader public
367 through the use of various media.
- 368 • Our church schools teach Mennonite Christian values to many students outside the
369 reach of our congregations.
- 370 • Since 2001, Mennonite Men, through an effort called Join Hands, has contributed
371 more than \$800,000 in grants for facilities to 26 congregations, of which about a
372 third were Racial/Ethnic groups. Some were churches outside the U.S.
- 373

374 Issues that cause concern:

- 375 • Drop in numbers from 120,381 members and 1,063 congregations in 2001 to 104,687
- 376 members and 872 congregations in 2011, for a net loss of 191 congregations and
- 377 15,694 members over 10 years. (Many congregations left in anticipation of the 2002
- 378 merger of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church. The
- 379 number of congregations leaving has slowed since that time.)
- 380 • Drop in overall churchwide budgets.
- 381 • Demographics that show we are aging as a denomination.
- 382 • Decrease in denominational loyalty.
- 383 • A growing support of nationalism that runs counter to our convictions for peace
- 384 and justice.
- 385 • Increased political tension in our church due to alignment with political parties
- 386

387 Three important studies of Mennonite Church USA have helped to paint a picture of the

388 trends and challenges that we face collectively as a church. Brief summaries of their

389 findings are cited below.

390

391 *Denominational giving patterns:* In 2005, Michael Wiese and Richard L. Gerig conducted

392 a research study of giving patterns in our denomination. They found that “theological and

393 political views are an important explanation to differences in giving and attitudes toward

394 Mennonite Church USA.” Those members who “insist on giving to denominational

395 ministry, either through the congregation or directly, fit a general profile; they tend to be

396 older, contribute out of a habit of giving in response to what God has given them, are

397 denominationally oriented, and categorize themselves as ‘somewhat liberal’ theologically

398 and politically.” Other interesting information that Wiese and Gerig provided included the

399 fact that about 51% of the respondents categorized themselves as “conservative,” 45% as

400 “liberal,” with the rest not choosing a category. According to the survey, there was no

401 direct correlation between theological category and income level.

402

403 Wiese and Gerig also found that the relatively new concept of the “missional church” was

404 taking root. Although they observed that the definition and significance of the word

405 ‘missional’ needed further explanation, they found evidence that the focus was connecting

406 at the congregational level and leading to new initiatives.

407

408 They discovered that many people, especially in the older generation, appreciate the

409 theological underpinnings of “first fruits giving,” seeing it as a version of tithing. However,

410 the “system that has been established to ... implement ‘first fruits’ giving within Mennonite

411 Church USA...is not currently understood or effective in funding the denomination.” We are

412 not sure why this is the case. Perhaps the first fruits giving system was not introduced clearly

413 enough or was never widely favored by the various entities of the church.

414

415 Finally, they reported that “People need to see tangible results from their giving—

416 outcomes that matter and are documented and reported. Accountability from those

417 receiving support is essential, including assurances that funds are being used wisely and

418 efficiently.” The younger generation especially needs new “entry points” for giving.

419 “Stories of changed lives and the evidence of ‘making a difference’ must be told in ways

420 that excite the relational/experiential/pragmatic urges of young adults.”

421

422 This survey has significant insights for stewardship in all of the entities in our church—
423 from congregations to the national conference. We have yet to fully implement the
424 recommendations they had to offer.

425

426 *Church member profile:* In 2006, Mennonite Church USA participated in a Church
427 Member Profile that also involved other Anabaptist groups. This study was a follow-up on
428 similar studies conducted in 1972 and 1989. Conrad Kanagy’s book *Road Signs for the*
429 *Journey* reports extensively on the findings. Many congregations across the church studied
430 this book in small groups or Sunday School classes. A few highlights follow.

431

432 The survey supported what sociologists know about American Christians as a whole—
433 congregations are more important to members than are denominations and area
434 conferences. Among members of Mennonite Church USA, 34 percent say they are “very
435 strongly” committed to the denomination and 12 percent to their area conference. In
436 comparison, 58 percent are “very strongly” committed to their local congregation.

437

438 A major shift in our church over the past three decades has been the increase in members
439 from other denominations at several different levels: 1) The percent of “noncradle”
440 Mennonites—neither parent being Mennonite—has risen since 1972 from 17 percent to 26
441 percent. 2) The percent of Mennonites who have been members in other denominations
442 (including noncradle Mennonites) has increased from 14 percent in 1972 to 30 percent
443 today. 3) The percent of Mennonite members who married a spouse from another
444 denomination has risen from 25 percent in 1972 to 39 percent in 2006.

445

446 The survey found that we have become much more professional over the past three
447 decades. The proportion of Mennonites who are in business and professional occupations
448 has risen from 25% in 1972 to 41% today, as has the percentage in technical, sales, and
449 administrative support—from 7% to 27%. The percentage of members identifying
450 themselves as “housewife/homemaker” has shrunk from 35% in 1972 to only 7% in 2006.
451 Only 8% are farmers, down from 11%.

452

453 The survey also found that we have an aging membership. The average age of Mennonites
454 today is 54 years, five years older than in 1989. More important, however, is the rapidly
455 shifting age distribution of Mennonites. In 1972, 54 percent of Mennonites were under age
456 45—within childbearing age. This number declined to 45 percent in 1989 and was 30
457 percent in 2006.

458

459 They also found that the growth of Racial/Ethnic congregations, especially immigrant
460 congregations, is changing the face of Mennonite Church USA. These groups include
461 members who are African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian and “other
462 than Anglo.” In the past five years, 25 percent of the denomination’s new members have
463 been Racial/Ethnic, compared with just 6 percent among those members who entered the
464 denomination more than five years before 2006.

465

466 In 1972, 37 percent of Mennonites claimed no political party identity, compared with only
467 11 percent in 2006. Increases have occurred for both Republicans and Democrats. In 1972,
468 42 percent of Mennonites identified themselves as Republicans, compared with 50 percent
469 in 2006. During this same period the proportion of Democrats nearly doubled, from 12
470 percent to 22 percent.

471 Kanagy concluded that the forces of modern and postmodern culture—professionalism,
472 education, individualism and suburbanization—continue to shape Mennonites. We are
473 more assimilated in the broader culture than before, and the increased identification of
474 Mennonites with political parties threatens to polarize members around controversial
475 issues.

476

477 *Executive Board review:* In 2008, partly in response to the findings in the Church Member
478 Profile, the Executive Board made a number of recommendations to help improve the
479 alignment of the various entities of the church with the vision, purpose and priorities of
480 Mennonite Church USA. They were especially concerned about the duplication of services
481 among various churchwide agencies and a lack of connectivity among the various parts of
482 the national conference, and hoped to streamline the structure and organization of the
483 church.

484

485 To assist in this task, the board hired consultant LaVern Yutzy, who in January 2010
486 produced a “Report on Alignment Opportunities for Mennonite Church USA.” The
487 Executive Board and its staff have responded in some depth to most of his numerous
488 recommendations. This Purposeful Plan is perhaps the most visible result of the efforts of
489 the Executive Board (including Yutzy’s report), although much more alignment work
490 remains to be done. For example, we have yet to fully clarify the role of area conferences
491 in our missional strategy and we have only begun to coordinate shared services across our
492 churchwide agencies. We will pursue ongoing alignment as we seek to carry out the work
493 of this purposeful plan.

494

495 **5. What circumstances might cause us to make adjustments to our goals along the** 496 **way?**

497

498 Since Nashville 2001 we have seen a number of ways that the life and work of Mennonite
499 Church USA has been dramatically affected by events outside our control. The most
500 global, pervasive and influential of these environmental developments took place on
501 September 11, 2001, just a few months after the Nashville event. The attack on the World
502 Trade Center in New York City led the United States to declare a war against terrorism.
503 This has been the longest and most expensive United States military engagement ever. It
504 has produced a deep anxiety and a fear of “the other,” with particular focus on Muslims
505 and Middle Eastern people, resulting in the tightest security measures in U.S. history. That
506 anxiety and fear have resulted in increased levels of suspicion and distrust in our society.
507 The fear of outsiders, and terrorists in particular, has created a challenging environment,
508 particularly for Racial/Ethnic groups, during a time of rapid growth of those Racial/Ethnic
509 groups in society and in Mennonite Church USA.

510

511 Further, the 2010 U.S. Census demonstrated some significant shifts in the demographics of
512 our nation, some related to the pace of immigration, particularly in the Sun Belt, in the last
513 decade. Consequently, the “center” of the U.S. population has shifted westward to Plato,
514 Missouri, continuing a trend that moved the center about 60 miles over the last 20 years.
515 This mirrors a trend which is reflected among the youth in Mennonite Church USA,
516 although the large majority of members still live in the East and Midwest.

517

518 The 2010 census also noted the rapidly continuing growth of the nonwhite population.
519 Hispanics and Asians were the fastest growing demographic groups, with an increase of 42

520 percent since 2000. Hispanics now account for 1 out of 6 people in this nation, with 1 out
521 of 4 children being Hispanic.

522

523 The passage of SB1070, Arizona's tough anti-immigration law, set off a vigorous and
524 polarized debate across the United States. Long before the Arizona bill was proposed,
525 Mennonite Church USA had already committed to holding our convention in Phoenix for
526 2013. This legislative development has deeply affected our church. We have given many
527 hours to discernment of the best ways to respond to this development. Our church is
528 divided in our determination of the best way to continue our plans for a convention while
529 demonstrating solidarity with those who are most affected, particularly *Iglesia Menonita*
530 *Hispana*. The positive side of this question is that it has alerted the church to the plight of
531 our immigrant population. This development calls for specific adjustments to our
532 antiracism goals. Part of our response to this situation has led us to hire a new staff person
533 who can draw on the resources of the Damascus Road antiracism training team as well as
534 other programs.

535

536 Again, in the last few years, we have seen a worldwide economic recession that has
537 brought the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. We have felt the
538 impact to some degree all across our church. Many congregations and conferences, as well
539 as churchwide entities, have reduced their programs and laid off staff.

540

541 The economic stress in our nation, combined with the growing fear of "the other" has
542 resulted in a growing intolerance for immigrant peoples. Hundreds of "hate groups" have
543 emerged across the United States, each with a particular focus for their anger. Many of the
544 various Racial/Ethnic groups within Mennonite Church USA, particularly Latinos, face an
545 unprecedented level of intolerance and racial profiling in their home communities,
546 regardless of their citizenship status.

547

548 Recently the world has witnessed a wave of political demonstrations and protests and
549 military action in the Middle East and North Africa, commonly referred to as the Arab
550 Spring. This phenomenon may well have inspired a series of demonstrations in New York
551 City which inspired similar actions in other cities in the U.S. and other parts of the world. A
552 common theme in all of these protests is a concern about the social and economic inequities
553 between the rich and the poor. The ultimate result of these activities is not yet clear, but
554 significant changes have already occurred in those regions because of the demonstrations,
555 protests and actions.

556

557 In addition to the challenges engendered by people, the world has suffered some of its
558 most dramatic natural disasters in the last decade. The earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia
559 in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf states in 2005, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the
560 March 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan and the devastating floods and tornadoes in the
561 United States in May 2011 have all touched the sympathies of the world by their severity.
562 Reinsurers have declared 2010 the most expensive disaster year ever, with an estimated
563 \$218 billion in damages worldwide.

564

565 Along the same line, a dramatic shift in global weather patterns has raised deep concerns
566 about a lack of water, leading to a food crisis with its most dramatic effect in the global
567 south. In addition to these events, the disastrous April-July 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of
568 Mexico brought renewed urgency to a creation care movement concerned about the

569 damage or depletion of natural resources. These disasters point to the importance of having
570 Mennonite Church USA commit itself to increasing creation stewardship and to remain in
571 vital partnership with relief and development agencies such as Mennonite Central
572 Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service. Environmental disasters provide significant
573 opportunities for the church to engage in holistic witness.
574

575 The last several years have seen rapid changes in our nation's attitudes toward same sex
576 attraction. For the first time, as reported in a May 2011 Gallup Poll, more than half of the
577 respondents supported the legalization of same sex marriage. This social shift is reflected
578 to some extent in Mennonite Church USA; our church reflects the divide in our nation. We
579 cannot afford to ignore these differences of conviction; neither can we afford to allow this
580 issue to become the most important issue in our life together. We must learn what it means
581 when we say we intend to agree and disagree in love. Does it mean we will seek to be civil
582 to each other in the midst of our difference in polity? Or does it mean we can live with
583 different polities?
584

585 The church has also been dramatically affected by recent changes in information
586 technology. These developments have led to what some have called *deep changes*,
587 resulting in basic adjustments in the way that people live and work. When the delegates
588 met at Nashville 2001, no one had ever heard of My Space, Facebook, or Twitter. Yet
589 these social networks are the primary ways that youth and young adults communicate
590 today. Over the last decade, the number of active blogs has grown from 12,000 to 141
591 million. At the same time, the number of daily newspapers has declined from 1,480 to
592 1,302. In 2000, the average person spent 2.7 hours per week online; in 2010 the average
593 person spent 18 hours per week online. These dramatic changes have accentuated the
594 "digital divide" between rich and poor, young and old. Technology is expensive, especially
595 for early adopters, and many cannot afford it.
596

597 All of the trends in the general population regarding technology are mirrored in the
598 membership of Mennonite Church USA, including the digital divide. These changes have led
599 many of the "communities" across Mennonite Church USA to make significant adjustments.
600 Many congregations and area conferences distribute information in electronic format rather
601 than in print form. We now put our national directory online rather than printing it on paper.
602 We have several Facebook pages. Further, the discerning use of new technology enables us to
603 touch people with the gospel in new and creative ways.
604

605 The dramatic changes in our world, even the deep crises that affect us in very negative
606 ways, carry with them the seeds of renewal. The crises that bring us to our knees can point
607 us back to our most basic commitments and help us see new ways to live these values in a
608 changing world. Some of the most creative and life giving developments in the church
609 have come about in response to a crisis.
610

611 For example, the challenge of conscription during wartime led to alternative service
612 arrangements such as Civilian Public Service during World War II and I-W service during
613 the Korean War. These new programs provided pathways for Christian service and witness
614 in a wide variety of settings around the globe.
615

616 Again, Mennonite Disaster Service was formed as a compassionate missional response to
617 natural disasters. The programs that provided alternative service and disaster relief

618 benefited many who are not a part of Mennonite Church USA. They also had a significant
619 impact on the volunteers who served, changing the way they view our church and the
620 world.

621

622 In Part One of this document, we said that church leaders should avoid partisan politics in
623 the work of the church. Further, we dare not accept three myths at the core of prevailing
624 American thought: a) personal freedom and fulfillment is achieved by throwing off
625 restraints and limitations, as symbolized by Hollywood; b) military domination of the
626 world is better than all available alternatives, as symbolized by the U.S. military industrial
627 complex; and c) unfettered corporate capitalism, as symbolized by the excesses too
628 common on Wall Street, is the best way for all of us to get by.

629

630 To stand against these myths as a church, we must bear witness to the freedom and
631 fulfillment we have found by binding ourselves to the way of Jesus, to communities of
632 faith, and to relationships of love and fidelity. We must ultimately place our security in
633 Jesus Christ, the prince of peace, rather than seeking to find our security in the power of
634 empire. We must commit ourselves to the biblical principle of Jubilee alongside economic
635 practices that serve the common good and create opportunities for working people and the
636 poor.

637

638 In our current context, these are identity markers that will signify the saving power of our
639 Lord. As we publicly embrace this kind of nonconformity, the seven priorities outlined in
640 the section below will indeed do their work, making of us “an effective sign, instrument
641 and foretaste of God’s kingdom.”

642

643 **6. What are the next steps on the path?**

644

645 When we live in times of moderate change in familiar territory, we can follow a path that
646 has been laid out on a map. But when we come to new and unfamiliar territory, it will
647 require a compass, with an eye to the “north star,” an unshakeable confidence that God will
648 lead us into the future.

649

650 Nevertheless, upon reflection on our current situation, we believe that we need a
651 reinvigorated strategy, a plan by which we can put our church on a path of growth
652 faithfully following Jesus. The following pages set forth a number of outcomes and goals
653 that we believe to be consistent with the marks of a missional church. To implement this
654 plan will require reliance on God’s wisdom and a deep reliance on God’s power. We
655 believe that to embark on this journey is an investment in hope, not only for our church but
656 also for the world that God loves.

657

658 **Alternate routes**

659

660 As we envision the future of our church, we discern a number of strategic choices that lie
661 before us. The direction that we choose at each of these junctures will shape our experience
662 of the journey. We often live with tension between what seem like equally good choices.
663 Yet in each of the pairs listed below, we believe that God is calling us to emphasize the
664 first option as we pursue our missional calling.

665

666 Common vision or Divisive issues – The landscape of American society is changing
667 dramatically through the impact of various movements—religious, educational,
668 technological, generational and demographic. Our nation is deeply divided on issues such
669 as abortion, health care, immigration policy, the role of the federal government, support of
670 Israel/Palestine, and human sexuality, particularly same-sex relationships. Political parties
671 often build their platform and/or policies around these divisive issues.

672
673 Since we increasingly identify with political parties, our church is increasingly divided
674 along the same lines as the nation. Even though we read the same scriptures as members of
675 the same church, we often interpret and apply the scriptures differently in response to
676 social issues. Pastors often feel torn, not knowing how best to respond to the very vocal
677 and aggressive discourse that can develop in their congregations regarding the issues being
678 debated in the media, especially around election time.

679
680 What then shall we do as delegates at our biennial assemblies? How much time should we
681 give to debating and voting on the divisive issues named above and others at the national
682 conference level, knowing that our church in its many parts (even after careful study of the
683 Bible and prayers for guidance) largely mirrors the political differences in our society? To
684 what extent should the denominational meeting directly address, debate and/or vote on the
685 issues that divide us? To what extent should these conversations be focused at the
686 congregational and conference levels of our church? The Pittsburgh Experiment suggests
687 that the church must focus on the main thing that unites us—the vision, purpose and
688 priorities of our missional church—lest we leave our assemblies as winners and losers on
689 issues that deeply divide us. At the same time, we can benefit from respectful dialogue on
690 the most difficult issues. And we may need to discern when and if it is the time to reaffirm
691 our polity or change our polity through a process of discernment that most likely would
692 require a vote.

693
694 We observe that a number of denominations have debated and voted on the issue of gay
695 marriage over many years before coming to a vote to change their polity. The social stress
696 and intra-denominational quarreling consumed a great deal of energy and enthusiasm in
697 their meetings, accompanied by significant loss of membership.

698
699 As part of a series of discussions that started in 2009, Mennonite Church Canada decided
700 to enter into several years of discernment regarding issues of human sexuality. As the
701 church is ready, the delegates at their annual assembly will address the difficult issue of
702 same-sex marriage in a discernment process. As we deal with this issue in Mennonite
703 Church USA, we will need to decide what will be the main focus for our delegate
704 assembly.

705
706 The goals identified under each of the seven priorities in the last section of this document
707 reflect the discernment of the Executive Board that we set goals that reflect the highest
708 priorities of the church. They are the steps that invite us to walk shoulder-to-shoulder in
709 the community of communities across Mennonite Church USA as we pursue the missional
710 journey.

711
712 Abundance or Scarcity – One of the most often quoted verses among early Anabaptists
713 was Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in
714 it.” It was a mandate to evangelize beyond the human boundaries of parish and nation-

715 state. But it was also an affirmation of the vast resources at God’s disposal, evoking a
716 sense of God’s abundance and a mandate for Christian stewardship.

717
718 Philanthropy in America has become donor-driven, which has made it an arena of intense
719 competition. This has resulted in a trend with individuals giving directly to programs rather
720 than through the offering plate. Along with other denominations, Mennonite Church USA
721 faces a shrinking financial base since we have lost members and younger donors are less
722 loyal to institutions. We are aware that those denominations that emphasize congregational
723 giving to the denomination for general budgets tend to face declining interest and income.

724
725 This is a time when we could easily develop a mentality of scarcity. Yet we know that we
726 are greatly blessed with God’s abundance as a church, and that denominations that reward
727 high commitments to mission tend to grow. While a recent survey showed that
728 congregations in Mennonite Church USA have fared better than most during the recent
729 economic downturn we also know that the missional efforts of many parts of our church
730 are constrained by lack of resources.

731
732 We believe that God is calling Mennonite Church USA to focus on the highest priorities in
733 the church, inviting individuals to give generously of time, talents, and treasure in ventures
734 that carry out our vision of healing and hope to the world.

735
736 High expectation or Low expectation of members – At the beginning of the Anabaptist
737 movement, the congregations had high expectations of their members, not unlike the
738 monastic groups of their day. The social and even physical cost of joining the movement
739 was very high, since it often involved alienation from family members and persecution by
740 governing authorities. This is still true of many vibrant churches around the world today.
741 In these settings members are expected to give generously of their “time, talent, and
742 treasure” to the church. Members attend church services once or more each week, engage
743 in specific ministries, and tithe to the church. To become a member may require many
744 hours of orientation and the signing of a covenant commitment. These missional churches
745 function like covenant communities which have a higher attendance than membership,
746 since there is a high threshold to join.

747
748 Many congregations in Mennonite Church USA have low commitment from their
749 members, with a primary emphasis on member’s rights rather than responsibilities. In
750 some cases, there are such low expectations of church members that people can remain on
751 the church rolls long after they have ceased to have any active involvement in the life of
752 the church. The membership of these churches is higher than their attendance. These
753 churches function like voluntary associations where people can easily leave, sometimes
754 without being noticed.

755
756 We believe that God is calling Mennonite Church USA to develop a culture of high expectation
757 for people who call themselves members of the church. Each church will provide a welcome to
758 seekers, skeptics, doubters, or explorers and invite them to become fully committed disciples of
759 Jesus Christ, meaningfully engaged in God’s mission in the world.

760
761 Soft or Hard geographical boundaries – All congregations in Mennonite Church USA
762 belong to the national conference by virtue of belonging to an area conference. Most area
763 conferences are roughly geographical in nature, although there is a good bit of overlap in

764 some regions. For various reasons, there are some congregations who have membership in
765 conferences quite outside the region where they are located. In addition, there are
766 Racial/Ethnic constituent groups whose congregational members are scattered across
767 Mennonite Church USA.

768
769 Tight geographical restrictions reflect the pre-automobile era, when most social
770 associations were forced to be much more localized than they are today. Denominations
771 that emphasize and enable peer relationships between congregations (even at a distance) to
772 encourage mission are growing, whereas denominations that emphasize hierarchical
773 relationships with the denomination are losing members.

774
775 We believe that God is calling us to facilitate greater affinity, connection, and perhaps
776 affiliation across geographical boundaries for the sake of growth in mission.
777 Denominations that are growing are finding ways to help congregations, regardless of their
778 location, to connect with teaching churches that are one step ahead of them in their specific
779 call to ministry. In the best scenario, the learners come from congregations as teams, not
780 individuals. Teaching churches emphasize peer learning, sharing what has worked for them
781 in ministry. We intend to facilitate horizontal connections across Mennonite Church USA
782 to help plant new churches, develop new strategies, and create a network of teaching
783 churches.

784
785 *Resources or Regulation* – As Anabaptist Christians, we believe that congregations are the
786 primary expression of God’s work in the world. Following the lead of other fellowships of
787 faith, we have also organized ourselves at the level of area conferences and a national
788 conference. We do not, however, see ourselves as a highly centralized denomination
789 organized to regulate the life of conferences or congregations.

790
791 We believe that God is calling Mennonite Church USA to be a community of
792 communities, each one carrying out the vision of healing and hope. Together with area
793 conferences and churchwide agencies, the national conference is a community that
794 resources the life and ministry of congregations by providing. . .

- 795 1. a sense of identity and belonging that transcends the local context.
- 796 2. ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations.
- 797 3. educational resources and other means of discipleship.
- 798 4. encouragement during difficult times in congregational life.
- 799 5. broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of our mission in
800 the world.
- 801 6. support for calling, training, and sustaining congregational leaders.
- 802 7. ways to keep communal vision and memory alive and refreshed.
- 803 8. avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief.
- 804 9. outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues.
- 805 10. a shared public voice when broad consultation is needed in order to speak well.

806 807 **Polarities to manage**

808
809 The following paragraphs reflect some of the creative tensions that must be managed well
810 to maintain a healthy church. In each of the pairs, both sides are needed. However, at any
811 given time, one side may need to be emphasized more than the other in order to achieve a
812 better balance. Healthy churches may experience a “virtuous cycle” of movement back and

813 forth between the poles, emphasizing one over the other in response to the need of the
814 moment.

815

816 *Strong servant leadership AND Church management* – The Anabaptist movement was
817 born in the midst of widespread rebellion against leadership in the Roman Catholic
818 Church. The movement soon adopted Luther’s concept of the “priesthood of all believers,”
819 at times with disdain for the clergy or state church leaders. At times since then, we have
820 found it difficult to fully trust our own leaders. Our belief in the priesthood of all believers
821 can lead us to wrongly conclude that pastors are mere facilitators or coordinators of
822 ministry. Churches that provide adequate room for leaders to point the direction and lead
823 the way toward an uncharted future are growing, while denominational systems that
824 depend on clergy primarily for management and regulation are losing members. Effective
825 pastors—especially those who fit the congregation well and have a long tenure—play a
826 crucial role in the missional focus of the church. They lead without being authoritarian or
827 dominating.

828

829 We believe that God is calling our church to empower leaders in our midst to lead, not
830 simply manage the affairs of the church. Yet the church also needs good managers who
831 will carry out the vision of the church in the most mundane details of church life. The
832 healthiest and most effective churches call forth both leaders and managers, each of which
833 are faithful to the church’s highest calling.

834

835 *Empowering leaders AND Professional clergy* – The Anabaptist movement was largely a
836 lay movement from the start, with a strong emphasis on the call (or vocation) of every
837 member. We taught that while not all are called to pastoral ministry, all are called to be
838 Christian “ministers” in their daily life work. We reacted against clergy in the European
839 theological traditions who acted as though the laity could not be trusted to interpret
840 scripture, discern God’s will, or speak in God’s name. Over time, as our church recognized
841 the need for educated pastors, we developed high-quality seminaries who trained
842 professional pastors. Unfortunately, the 2006 membership profile suggests that many
843 Mennonite church members resist seeing themselves as “ministers,” and efforts by pastors
844 to challenge this notion receive little support. Some act as though it’s primarily the job of
845 professional pastors to carry out the ministry of the church. Perhaps we have reverted to an
846 understanding of the priesthood like that of the faith traditions we abandoned during the
847 Reformation.

848

849 The most effective congregations have collaborative servant leaders—both clergy and
850 lay—who work dynamically with each other to empower the whole community for its
851 missional vocation. Some of the most effective churches have teams of both paid and
852 volunteer staff whose shared leadership reflects the makeup of the congregation as well as
853 the local community. We believe that God is calling our church to provide a place for
854 people on a quest for sufficient challenges or opportunities to engage their spiritual gifts
855 and passion in ministries that make a difference in the world. We will renew our emphasis
856 on the ministry of all God’s people by challenging the creativity, participation, and gifts of
857 the laity in every congregation and area conference, including all levels of governance in
858 our church.

859

860 We may well need to provide some new forms of training for lay leaders to help this
861 happen. We have developed a “missional lens” that is being used to develop new leaders

862 for the church in mission. This lens can provide the focus for lay leaders as well as pastors.
863 Our seminaries are poised to assist in this quest.

864

865 *Culturally relevant AND Rooted in our heritage* – The Anabaptist movement was born in
866 Europe during a tumultuous period of church reformation and fragmentation of the Roman
867 Catholic Church. Our forebears later emigrated to America, bringing their language and
868 traditions with them. Over time, for good or ill, our church has largely assimilated to the
869 ways of America. Yet many of our churches have a culture that is off-putting to
870 newcomers in our midst.

871

872 Researchers have noticed that denominations birthed in America are growing much more
873 rapidly than those imported from Europe. This does not simply have to do with their age,
874 but rather reflects the basic ethos and polity of the church. Churches started in Medieval
875 Europe tend to employ hierarchical structures that reflected the vassal system. Churches
876 started in America tend to value leaders with a more charismatic and entrepreneurial style,
877 with more emphasis on individual rights and expression. It is difficult at times to sort out
878 which of these tendencies are healthy and which oppose the gospel as we understand it.
879 Books like *The Naked Anabaptist* can help us sort out the difference between the core of
880 the gospel and mere cultural “clothing” adapted to a particular time and place.

881

882 When we take the gospel to various parts of the world, we emphasize the importance of
883 adapting the message of the gospel to the particular context of ministry. In the same way,
884 we believe that God is calling us to discern anew the ways that we bring the gospel to bear
885 on our own culture. Our society is rapidly becoming post-Christian and even anti-
886 Christian. The changes that have recently taken place in society have made much of what
887 was effective in 1955 obsolete today. These realities make pastoral and congregational
888 ministry much more challenging. We must encourage congregations to seek new ways to
889 reach their neighbors in the name of Christ. This does not imply flashy technology, trendy
890 worship, or shallow entertainment, but genuine engagement with the deep needs of our
891 world. Our hope is to address the needs we see in our culture without falling prey to the
892 consumerist mentality that often produces those needs.

893

894 *Creating the new AND Preserving what is good of the old* – Older churches often become
895 revitalized as they engage in new expressions of ministry. This may take various forms,
896 including the formation of new small groups, house fellowships, intentional communities,
897 as well as traditional church starts. People who are new to the congregation often find their
898 niche in newer groups where people are still learning to know each other. They find it
899 more difficult to fit into a group that has long association with each other, which can feel
900 like an exclusive clique.

901

902 One of the most important indicators of a healthy missional church is its ability to bring
903 forth and nurture new communities of Christ-centered faith. Denominations that focus on
904 starting new churches are growing, especially those that start new congregations in order to
905 reach different Racial/Ethnic groups or a new demographic population. Those
906 denominations that focus primarily on subsidizing smaller, older congregations are losing
907 members. We celebrate the number of new churches in Mennonite Church USA, both
908 those that have been planted and those who have recently come to affiliate with us. We
909 believe God is calling Mennonite Church USA to encourage the planting of many new
910 churches, even new networks of churches.

911 **Outcomes and Goals**

912

913 We strongly encourage congregations, conferences, and churchwide agencies to pursue a
914 wide range of goals related to the missional vision and purposeful plan reflected above. We
915 intend to develop creative new ways to share about such goals and resulting missional
916 stories across the whole church. At the same time, we recognize that not nearly all those
917 goals can or should be reflected in this document. Therefore, we have limited the following
918 list to a sampling of new goals that express the accountability of the national conference to
919 the delegate assembly. Many of the goals require the active collaboration of national
920 conference staff with area conferences and churchwide agencies. As area conferences and
921 churchwide agencies develop specific goals related to this Purposeful Plan, we will
922 develop communication links to also make those goals readily accessible to the whole
923 church.

924

925 The following outcomes and goals can only be achieved by God’s grace and the
926 empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Even so, some of these goals may take many years to
927 achieve, depending on the availability of resources. These goals reflect the aspirations and
928 intentions of our whole church, and we will seek to be accountable to the delegate body in
929 achieving them. The dates in parentheses behind each of the goals below indicate the
930 period of time in which we intend to pursue that goal and report to the delegate body on
931 the progress or completion of it.

932

933 **1. Christian Formation**

934

935 **Outcome we seek:** To increase our capacity as a community of faith to be and make
936 disciples of Jesus Christ

937

938 **Goals we intend to pursue:**

939

- 940 • Produce an evangelical/Anabaptist discipleship training resource in English and
941 Spanish called “Begin Anew” (written by Palmer Becker) in cooperation with
942 Mennonite Church Canada (2014)
- 943 • Discern the nature and scope of a possible new hymn collection in collaboration
944 with Mennonite Church Canada and MennoMedia (2015)
- 945 • Update the Mennonite Ministers Manual in cooperation with Mennonite Church
946 Canada and MennoMedia (2016)
- 947 • Negotiate with other-than-Mennonite seminaries to offer our seminaries’ online
948 Mennonite Faith and Polity course and other Anabaptist courses to their Mennonite
949 students (2014)

949

950 **2. Christian Community**

951

952 **Outcome we seek:** To deepen our capacity to engage in biblical/communal discernment
953 and deal with our differences in a Christ-like manner

954

955 **Goals we intend to pursue:**

956

- 957 • Develop resources for biblical/communal discernment to be used in congregations,
958 area conferences, and other settings where believers seek to discern God’s will
regarding important matters as a church (2015)

- 959 • Develop a covenant to express the relationship of the area conferences with the
- 960 national conference and each other as an update to the Membership Guidelines
- 961 (2015)
- 962 • Create a denominational statement of apology and a public service of lament for the
- 963 abuses perpetuated by credentialed leaders in our denomination (2015)
- 964

965 3. *Holistic witness*

966
967 **Outcome we seek:** To deepen engagement across the church in service, peacemaking,
968 evangelism, witness for justice and helping to birth new communities of faith

969 **Goals we intend to pursue:**

- 971 • Convene a church planting summit to enable practitioners, area conference leaders,
- 972 historians, missiologists and theologians to explore what we can learn from our past
- 973 experiences in church planting and to discern God’s calling for the future (2015)
- 974 • Create a written resource that encourages reflection and action for incarnational,
- 975 missional church development from an Anabaptist perspective (2016)
- 976 • Establish a network of pastors, spiritual directors and other qualified individuals to
- 977 clarify core “spiritual practices of a peacemaker” (2015)
- 978 • Develop training and resources to equip congregations to build relationships with
- 979 returning veterans (2013-2015)
- 980 • Assist Mennonite pastors and other leaders in participating in Israel/Palestine
- 981 learning tours in keeping with the commitments we expressed in our response to
- 982 the *Kairos Palestine* document (see [www.mennoniteusa.org/2011/12/07/](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/2011/12/07/mennonite-church-usa-responds-to-appeal-from-palestinian-christians/)
- 983 [mennonite-church-usa-responds-to-appeal-from-palestinian-christians/](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/2011/12/07/mennonite-church-usa-responds-to-appeal-from-palestinian-christians/))
- 984 (2013-2018)
- 985

986 4. *Stewardship*

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988 **Outcome we seek:** To reflect God’s abundance through our generosity as God’s stewards,
989 in order to achieve missional goals across all parts of the church

990 **Goals we intend to pursue:**

- 992 • Provide stewardship training and education for immigrant congregations that are
- 993 relevant to their context (2013-2015)
- 994 • Identify or develop websites that explain the stewardship implications of
- 995 Anabaptist values for individuals and families and provide tools and resources for
- 996 implementing them (2013-2015)
- 997 • Identify or develop resources to assist congregations and area conferences in
- 998 creating and managing healthy financial plans for the future (2013-2015)
- 999 • Provide resources for congregational study via the Mennonite Creation Care
- 1000 Network (MCCN) to deepen our biblical understanding of creation care (2013-
- 1001 2015)
- 1002 • Proactively assist young adults and young families with navigating the “new
- 1003 normal” economy as they deal with financial challenges (start in 2013)
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5. *Leadership Development*

Outcome we seek: To call, train and nurture church members with leadership gifts in Anabaptist theology and practice, and work together in various teams so that both credentialed and lay leaders can be empowered to fulfill the church’s missional vocation.

Goals we intend to pursue:

- Revise the *Mennonite Ministerial Polity* handbook, in collaboration with Mennonite Church Canada, to reflect both current practices and aspirations of the church we are being called to become (2014)
- Develop resources for leaders of boards in congregations, area conferences and agencies, to be delivered via multiple media, including personal coaching, online video sessions and handbooks for reflection (2014)
- Build upon the 2008 Missional Lens paper by identifying 35 congregations or networks of congregations as “Anabaptist Learning Centers,” sharpening their God-given gifts and experiences so they can share and resource other congregations, at times in cooperation with our schools and agencies (2013-2017)
- Plan and execute a Women Doing Theology Conference (2014)
- In collaboration with Mennonite Education Agency, introduce and develop 10 centers based in Mennonite Church USA congregations for the Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA) program in English (2015)

6. *Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation*

Outcome we seek: To overcome antipathy and alienation among different cultural groups through dismantling individual and systemic racism in our church, making a way for people of every Racial/Ethnic group to have just and equitable access to church resources, positions and information as manifestations of the one new humanity we have in Christ

Goals we intend to pursue:

- Complete an updated immigration statement and coordinate/provide resources for its implementation where needed (2015)
- Complete a six-week online Bible Study for congregations featuring Danny Carroll, Saulo Padilla and Tammy Alexander (2014)
- Provide at least 12 Intercultural Competency workshops to groups around the church (2015)
- Train at least 50 people as Communities of Hope facilitators in partnership with area conferences (2015)
- Coordinate a “Hope for the Future” event for People of Color and guest leaders from the dominant culture in the church to discuss aspirations for the future of people of color leadership in the church (2014)

7. *Church-to-Church Relationships*

Outcome we seek: To give and receive gifts within the broader body of Christ as a witness to the unity to which God calls us and to help us be more faithful to God’s mission in the world

1053 **Goals we intend to pursue:**

- 1054 • Collaborate with the planners of Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 16 in
1055 Harrisburg, Pa., to provide a wide and hospitable welcome for international guests
1056 to our 2015 biennial convention in Kansas City, Mo. (2013-2015)
- 1057 • Complete the proposed covenant arrangement with the *Communauté Mennonite au*
1058 *Congo* (CMCo) (Mennonite Church in Congo) and complete context-specific
1059 guidelines for church-to-church relationships among Mennonite Church USA
1060 congregations, CMCo and Congo Evangelical Church (CEM) in conjunction with
1061 Congo church leaders (2015)
- 1062 • Respond to the queries from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America about
1063 how we see our relationship to each other in the body of Christ, and to affirm the
1064 Mennonite World Conference–Lutheran World Federation dialogue on baptism
1065 (2013-2015)
- 1066 • Re-launch the Believers Church Conferences as an arena for exploring and
1067 articulating “free church” understandings with other denominations that practice
1068 adult baptism and share a believers church ecclesiology (such as Baptists,
1069 Pentecostals, Disciples and others) (2013-2016)
- 1070 • Develop partnerships and alliances with historic African-American and Hispanic
1071 churches and faith organizations (from denominations and traditions other than
1072 Mennonite Church USA) to expose and engage the prison industrial complex and
1073 the system of mass incarceration/immigrant detention in our country (2013-2018)
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1075 **Conclusion**

1076 We do not know what another decade may hold for Mennonite Church USA, or where God
1077 may lead. We intend to review the elements of this plan at each biennial session so that we
1078 can celebrate milestones and make appropriate adjustments along the way. May we follow
1079 God’s call, committed to move forward as people of faith, joined together in love and
1080 united in hope.
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1083 For further reference:

- 1084
1085 *Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities* by
1086 Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson, The Alban Institute, 2010.
1087 *The Naked Anabaptist* by Stuart Murray, Herald Press, 2010.
1088 “Pathways to a Missional Future: Becoming a Christ-like Church,” Mennonite Church USA.
1089 *Roadsigns for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* by Conrad Kanagy,
1090 Herald Press, 2007.
1091 *Treasures in Clay Jars: Partners in Missional Faithfulness* by Lois Barrett et. al. The
1092 Gospel and Our Culture Network, 2004. (See especially pages 159-172).
1093 “What is an Anabaptist Christian?” by Palmer Becker, *Missio Dei* publication number 18,
1094 Mennonite Mission Network.
1095

1096 Available for download on the Mennonite Church USA website:

- 1097 • Organizational Strategy, Culture and Structure for Mennonite Church USA 2001–2011
1098 http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/org_strat_cult_strc.pdf
1099 • Report on Alignment Opportunities for Mennonite Church USA by LaVern Yutzky
1100 http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/YutzkyReport_2010Jan12.pdf

- 1101 • Research Study of Denominational Giving, Mennonite Church USA, April 9, 2005
1102 [http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/research-study-of-denominational-giving-in-](http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/research-study-of-denominational-giving-in-mennonite-church-usa/)
1103 [mennonite-church-usa/](http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/research-study-of-denominational-giving-in-mennonite-church-usa/)
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1105 Final note: This document was developed by Ervin R. Stutzman under the auspices of the
1106 Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA. Stanley Green wrote the first draft of the
1107 response to questions 1 and 2 in Part 1. Since it was first shared publicly at the biennial
1108 convention in Pittsburgh in 2011, the document has incorporated changes suggested by the
1109 assembly delegates, the Constituency Leaders Council, the Governance Council, and the
1110 Executive Board.