

Our Purposeful Plan

Report to Delegate Assembly on 2015-2017 goals

The goals and priorities in *Our Purposeful Plan* point to the growing edges of the work of the Executive Board (EB) staff and beyond, in addition to the many routine ministries and resources we offer to conferences and congregations. As part of our accountability to the delegates, we report on progress toward these goals each biennium. Below, in response to each of the goals listed in *Our Purposeful Plan* (lines 933-1073) for the 2015-2017 biennium, we offer brief italicized comments on whether these goals have been achieved, partially achieved, or not achieved. The date in parentheses at the end of each goal indicates the date we projected for the goal to be achieved.

1. Christian Formation

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

Goals we intend to pursue:

- To design The Gathering Place, an interactive website for Anabaptist youth leaders for the purpose of connecting, resourcing, networking, mentoring and spiritual formation. It will facilitate cohort groups that gather through a variety of touch points, including video conferencing. (2016)
The Gathering Place launched and has had a successful last two years with over 26,000 page views and 9,400 users. In addition to the monthly live webinars on a variety of faith formation themes, The Gathering Place expanded to include an additional podcast to with Lesley and Caleb Francisco McClendon called “All About YOUth”; connected leaders across the nation in the formation of two connection circles (small group cohort groups) – one on family ministry facilitated by Clayton Gladish and the other on urban ministry facilitated by Danilo Sanchez; and added a monthly playlist of songs for youth ministers crafted by Ashley Litwiller on Spotify. Due to the positive feedback of our Advent Pause series (weekly live contemplative prayer and reflection using Leader magazine resources), The Gathering Place added a Lenten Pause as well, hosted by spiritual directors Merv Stoltzfus and Marlene Frankenfield.
- To partner with the Anabaptist Faith Formation Network (AFFN) — a digital resource center — to expand and strengthen faith formation initiatives across the church. (2016)
As the denominational minister of Christian Formation, Rachel Gerber has been a strong supporter of this excellent digital resource site. The Gathering Place has partnered with AFFN to host its monthly study circles as well as highlight new material added to the AFFN site. Rachel also joined Shana Peachy Boshart, editor and founder of AFFN, along with a few other

formation leaders (Andy Brubacher Kaethler—AMBS; Shannon Dycus—First Mennonite Indianapolis; Elsie Rempel—MC Canada; Carrie Martens—MC USA; Katherine Goerzen—Tabor Mennonite) to plan the Deep Faith conference (October 4-6, 2017, hosted at AMBS), a gathering of multi-disciplinary leaders seeking to learn together about the unique challenges and opportunities for 21st century faith formation in the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition. This binational gathering of approximately 200 participants received very positive reviews. The conversation continues through the Deep Faith Facebook page.

- To provide new resources to revitalize the spiritual life of our congregations and help them reach new people with the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Building on the discipleship resource Begin Anew developed two years ago with Palmer Becker, Terry Shue has now helped him to develop a congregational resource packet for studying the 16 lessons together. The online leader's guide—complete with professionally recorded video sessions of Palmer and others discussing the lesson topic-- will greatly aid groups who go through this series. There is also a daily devotional guide which ties in with the scripture and related topics. A generous grant from Schowalter Foundation helped make this resource possible. These resources are available on our website as a free pdf download, or for purchase on Amazon.com. <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/begin-anew/>

2. Christian Community

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

Goals we intend to pursue:

- To discern the nature and scope of the biennial denominational convention in response to the many changes happening in our church. (2016)
We have re-imagined our convention in a number of ways. Perhaps most visible is the plan for a Future Church Summit to be held during the delegate assembly sessions. We have provided greater opportunity for youth participation through the Step Up program. Because a shrinking number of people attend our convention, we are adapting by reducing the level of programming options, renting fewer worship spaces, and cutting back on some “bells and whistles.”
- To convene four small regional leadership retreats (10–12 people) with a diversity of participants to deepen our capacity to practice grace, love and forbearance towards each other in the church.
This goal was only partially met, in that we sponsored one such retreat. However, the retreat was viewed as a success by participants, and other groups have engaged in similar ventures without our guidance or assistance.
- To explore the theological nature of Christian unity in the face of the political and social differences that are dividing our church.
We have not worked on this goal in a measureable way.
- To strengthen Christian unity by drawing on the resources of *Renovaré* or similar spiritual formation programs to build on the best aspects of differing streams of spirituality within our church.
Ervin Stutzman wrote a series of columns for The Mennonite regarding the various spiritual streams, and we distributed some resources about spiritual streams written by Sherill Hostetter

to the Constituency Leaders Council. Also, Leo Hartshorn wrote about the various spiritual streams in a formative devotional “Love is a Verb: A one-year spiritual practices resource.” <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/love-is-a-verb-spiritual-practices-resource/>

- To provide specific resources to cultivate the development of spiritual practices that enable biblical/communal discernment across our church.

We have encouraged spiritual practices by promoting the use of spiritual direction, and have published a list of spiritual directors at <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SpiritualDirectorsList.pdf>. Jane Peifer is a spiritual director who served as a “discermentarian” for the delegate assembly at Kansas City 2015, and then for the Constituency Leaders Council for the 2015-2017 biennium.

3. *Holistic witness*

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

Goals we intend to pursue:

- To partner with area conferences, church planters and Mennonite Mission Network to plan for a church planting summit to energize and equip each other to help birth new kingdom communities. (2015–16)

Through partnership with Mauricio Chenlo and the Mission Network, we sponsored SENT church planting conferences in New Orleans in 2016 and in Fort Myers, Florida in 2017. Both gatherings drew a diverse group of leaders who are helping to birth new communities of faith, or re-energize the sense of mission in other settings. In addition, Mission Network staff are conducting a face to face survey on church planting with conference ministers to assess what is needed to encourage and facilitate church planting in conferences.

- To develop a plan to raise awareness of and deepen experience with three spiritual practices that sustain peacemaking. (2015–17)

The Peace and Justice Support Network developed a plan for one specific spiritual practice. They offered information and resourcing on “Peace Circles,” a small group spiritual discipline approach to cultivating active peace making. They plan to develop two other spiritual practices in the future.

- To form a reference council of Mennonite veterans and church leaders to advise and advocate for the Peace and Justice Support Network’s work with veterans of war. (2015–17)

We have not met this goal, but will continue to work on it.

- To assist Mennonite pastors and other leaders to participate in Israel-Palestine “Come and See” learning tours. (2013–18)

With assistance from Mennonite Central Committee, Mission Network and Everence, we met our goal of sending 100 leaders representing diverse groups across Mennonite Church USA on learning tours to Israel/Palestine in response to the Kairos letter. These groups learned through first-hand knowledge and gained new perspectives on the conflicts which plague this contested land which is claimed as a spiritual home by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

- To maximize the usage of *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice* — edited by Mennonite Mission Network staff — and other new resources to equip church leaders to live into God’s missional purposes. (2015–17)

The Mission Network has helped to make free copies of this resource available to various

groups, including Mennonite Church USA major donors, the delegates at Kansas City 2015, and 150 of our Mennonite World Conference global partners in Harrisburg, Pa. (2015) through the Global Mission Fellowship and Global Anabaptist Service Network. They have also offered seminars and workshops. We have provided missional resources at the Constituency Leaders Council.

4. Stewardship

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

Goals we intend to pursue, (with leadership by Everence, our stewardship agency):

- To apply for a Lilly Foundation grant to establish a program to aid pastors facing personal financial difficulties that might result in them leaving pastoral ministry. (2015–17)
In 2015, Everence received a \$1 million Lilly grant for this purpose. As of March 31, 2017, we approved 160 grants for \$6,000 (financial assistance plus tax gross up), 89 grants of \$1,000 for comprehensive financial planning, 79 subsidy grants for Mennonite Retirement Trust accounts and we have led 32 educational events for pastors and spouses.
- To develop two financial coaching programs: one to better prepare seminarians for personal financial management, and one to train lay leaders to assist individuals in their congregations who may be struggling with personal financial issues. (2015–17)
Several financial coaching seminars have been offered in both seminary and area conference settings. Topics addressed include: My money mindset, Emergency savings, Debt health and Creating a cash flow plan.
- To provide contextualized stewardship training and education for immigrant congregations. (2015–17)
We have expanded our Spanish language services, first by hiring bilingual staff, including Martin Navarro, who specifically serves Hispanic individuals and congregations. He visits churches, gives sermons, provides presentations and other resources to pastors and their attendees and offers financial education and services. Thus, the stewardship advocate system has grown in Hispanic churches. Everence has expanded Spanish-language print and digital resources. Everence also recently hired Leonard Dow, who will focus on serving urban congregations.
- To assist young adults and young families to successfully meet their financial challenges. (2015–17)
In the last two years we have expanded our services to this demographic of the church with programming and partnerships such as: Better Halves financial training for couples; COMPASS website created in collaboration with the Ecumenical Stewardship Center <https://www.stewardshipresources.org/COMPASS>; LSS budget and debt counseling <https://www.everence.com/LSS/>; and affording college training <https://www.everence.com/college/>
- To identify or develop resources to assist congregations and area conferences in creating and managing healthy financial plans. (2015–17)
Beryl Jantzi hosts a quarterly video conference call for Mennonite Church USA conference treasurers to facilitate collaboration on common challenges faced by area conferences. We continue to find success with hosting the Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity

seminar in regions of the church. Since 2012 we hosted 23 separate events; six of those were in the last biennium.

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:

- To review all of our Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures along with the supporting documents. (2016)
Though it took longer than we had anticipated, “Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure” and all of its supporting supplemental pages is complete. We received feedback through multiple drafts from conference ministers, professionals in our church who work in this specialty area, abuse survivors, legal counsel from both Canada and the U.S. and more. The document outlines a process which has been thoroughly vetted, with strong recommendations from several outside organizations including FaithTrust Institute. In addition, we developed a two-page flow chart which offers a visual map of the entire process of dealing with a complaint. Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann worked with Mennonite Church Canada staff to complete this work.
- To develop a vital and sustainable program — accessible through the internet — so that first-time pastors can transition into ministry accompanied by seasoned coaches. (2016)
Through the Leadership Development office, the Transitioning into Ministry (TiM) program is functioning with strong support from both participants and coaches. Cohorts of four to six pastors in their first two years of ministry meet six times a year with coaches who guide them for a period of two years. The local congregation, area conference and the office of Leadership Development all share the financial cost of the program, in addition to assistance from Everence for a face-to-face retreat. This fall we hope to add an extra day to this gathering to include ministerial healthy boundaries training in addition to the standard ministry competency topics, along with issues of ethics, resiliency and soul care as they pertain especially to the early years of ministry.
- To review and perhaps change the Ministry Inquiry Program (MIP) to assure its effectiveness as an ongoing program. (2016)
Rachel Gerber and Terry Shue convened a group of school representatives who administer the MIP along with several conference ministers to review and give new focus to the program. Along with deep appreciation for the program, the review group articulated the need for a stronger denominational perspective in the MIP rather than appearing to be independently run by each school. To that end, all of the supporting documents were reviewed and placed on Mennonite Church USA letterhead, and a new web page was added on the Mennonite Church USA website. In addition, Terry Shue and Rachel Gerber will host an annual orientation for all of the supervisors of MIP students via video conference. Then midway through the summer, Rachel will host a video conference with all of the MIP students for a group check-in. Nine students are participating in the program this summer.
- To complete revisions to the working ministerial polity document, *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership*. (2016)

This binational polity document—now called A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership was recently approved by the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA as well as the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada. Along with a few minor wording changes, the “working document” designation was removed, and a footnote added on page 63 which highlights recent resolutions from both of our denominations. We also removed a section which cited the Mennonite Church USA Membership Guidelines.

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:

- To increase to 15 the number of trained Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) Qualified Administrators who can resource area conferences and congregations. (2016)
We have exceeded this goal; there are now 18 qualified IDI administrators throughout Mennonite Church USA to serve congregations and conferences. Iris de León-Hartshorn provided a training for the IDI administrators August 9-11, 2016.
- To plan and coordinate a Women Doing Theology conference in 2016. *“I’ve Got the Power! Naming and reclaiming power as a force for good,” planned by the Women in Leadership Project steering committee, was held in Leesburg, Va., November 4-6, 2016. In attendance were 150 women. The conference was very diverse in both presenters and attendees. Jennifer Castro, coordinator of the Women in Leadership Project, provided staff support for this event.*
- To convene a Youth of Color Summit in 2016.
Glen Guyton and Calvary Community Church coordinated Culture Shock, a leadership conference for youth of color, on August 26-28, 2016. Four hundred attended the worship sessions and 90 youth attended the training sessions.
- To plan for the annual Hope for the Future gathering in January 2016.
More than 70 people attended Hope for the Future, a conference and connecting point for leaders of color held February 2-5, 2016 in Hampton, Va., at Calvary Community Church. “Doing Kingdom Work” was the theme, and Ruby Sales, civil rights leader, was the main speaker.
- To start work on the Doctrine of Discovery in partnership with Mennonite Central Committee U.S., Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, and the Mennonite Creation Care Network.
Mennonite Church USA has done some initial work on this goal and plans to do more in the next biennium.

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

Goals we intend to pursue:

- To help re-launch the Believers Church Conferences as an arena for exploring and articulating “free church” understandings with other denominations that practice adult baptism and share a believers church ecclesiology, such as Baptists, Pentecostals and Disciples. (2015–17)
Several members of Mennonite Church USA participated in the 17th Believers Church Conference, June 22-25, 2016, hosted by The Acadia Centre for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, a cooperative venture of Acadia Divinity College and the Acadia University Library. The topic of this conference was “Come-outers Among the Believers Churches: Historical Realities and Ecclesial Concerns in the Continuing Dissenter Tradition.” The gathering was smaller than similar ones in the past, but it drew participants from a broader group of Believers Churches than usual. The group built on this success by forming a diverse group to plan for future events.
- To commission ambassadors to help cultivate closer relationships and collaboration with denominational peace fellowships and ecumenical mission associations. (2015–17)
We have not pursued this goal.
- To explore various avenues (such as consultations, connecting senior leaders, and faculty exchanges) to cultivate relationship and dialogue with the Church of God (Cleveland), an historic Pentecostal denomination. (2015–17)
We made good progress on this goal. Six Mennonite academic leaders (Gerald Shenk, Alan Kreider, Nancy Bedford, Elizabeth Soto, Gayle Gerber Koontz and Jamie Pitts) and six Pentecostal leaders met in Cleveland, Tennessee on October 15-18, 2016 to worship, share testimonies, present and discuss formal dialogue papers on the theme “Power and Presence of the Spirit.” This meeting was projected as the first of several such annual gatherings.
- To develop relationships/partnerships with historic African-American and immigrant denominations, churches and faith organizations to call for reform in the prison industrial complex and the system of mass incarceration/immigrant detention in our country. (2013–18)
We worked at this goal through our participation with Christian Churches Together, and support the joint statement that emerged from the 2014 meeting <http://christianchurchestogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CCT-Mass-Incarceration-2014.pdf>. In addition, we have featured a series of blogs at <http://mennoniteusa.org/tag/immigration/> about workers at various local sites. We are aware that there are many other places where local congregations minister in various ways to those in prison or detention.

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