



Themes

Covision Report: July 7-8, 2017

Themes: What draws us to this faith?

- Strong sense of community, caring and mutual connection.
- Centrality of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ
- Being a peace church: living out faith through service and justice
- We experience God's Spirit in community
- Sense of welcome and belonging, which comes from being received as family
- Priesthood of all believers, active participation in discernment and mutually sharing our gifts
- Singing our theology by making music together
- Interpreting Scripture through the lens of Jesus, together
- Mutual aid economics - sharing our lives and resources with one another
- Radical orientation to Christ and nonconformity to the world.
- Faith as a voluntary choice -- Anabaptist values rather than "ethnic heritage"
- Awareness and Connection to the broader world. Emphasis on building global community. Expressing fellowship with the broader world.
- God is in the margins

Themes: Significant learnings from our history

- There are important histories missing from the timeline, Latino, Asians, Russians, General Conference...
- The church reflects the culture of its members
- Continually lost groups and members over an unwillingness to accept change and embrace transition (women, cars, LGBTQ, wearing a tie, women's rights, etc.)
- Maintained many distinctives through the years ... Peace witness, Jesus focus
- Blinded to the ways that our separatism privileged us and would shape us in unexpected ways.
- Long tension between congregational and denomination bases of power
- Difficulty in finding healthy ways to engage with diverse cultures in our world.
- The movement was splintered from the beginning - Its always been messy - well intentioned people make mistakes

Themes: What might this mean for us going forward?

- Coming to terms with, knowing about and learning from our complete, diverse histories (USA and global)
- Model humility and practice repentance. Do not repeat past and present wrongs.
- Institutional relationships might need to change. Do they have the capacity to change? And who gets to decide what those changes will be?
- Splits have happened and will continue to happen. How will we work through the tension while caring for each other?

Themes: Things that we affirm and take forward

- Jesus centered community that cares for each other, studies scripture together, discerns the moving of the Spirit, and lives out our faith
- Witness for peace in time of turmoil - "Saying no to War and Yes to Peace"
- Being Church in the World: Mission mindedness qualified with cultural sensitivity
 - Mission and service institutions and global engagement -- MCC, MDS, MMN, CPT, MWC
- Our struggle to become a multicultural/racial and diverse church
- Adaptation over time while maintaining our distinctiveness
- Affirmation of women in ministry and the full use of women's gifts
- The Holy Spirit in worship
 - Music and Singing together
- Nonconformity to empire ("materialism and nationalism") -- speaking truth, simple living and quirkiness

Themes: Things to lament, transform and/or let go

- Racism in church -- Centrality of white identity
- Boundaries of church that exclude -- insider/outsider mentality

- Complicity in colonialism/colonialistic approach to mission
- Painful patterns of splitting/division
- Not all stories being honored -- Difficulty in recognizing the various expressions of "being Mennonite"
 - In the Timeline exercise last night -- stories of Latinos and others were missing
- Assimilation to dominate culture and using assimilation to white Mennonite culture to deal with differences
- Passive aggressive avoidance of issues in the name of respectful dialogue
- Misuse/abuse of power -- sexual abuse, institutional, violence towards POC and LGBTQ people
- Marginalization of people of color, women, LGBTQ people
- We haven't totally merged as MCUSA; there were and are painful parts of the merger.
- Complicity and silence about process, systems and structures that cause harm
- Declining focus on spiritual vitality and formation

Themes: What are the implications of having diverse identities within our church?

- More voices means we need to find more creative ways to be patient and listen.
- Diversity in our communities gives us access to a spectrum of God's gifts
- A more just distribution of power and resources in the Church and churches
 - Be mindful of power and how it affects marginalized voices.
- We struggle together with the boundaries of our church body--regarding our biblical vision for inclusion/exclusion
- Change brings a fear of the unknown (loss of friends, relationships, pushed too far)
- Staying in conversation about diversity requires spiritual discipline
- One size may not fit all. Find our niche as congregations and figure out where we can minister effectively.
- Holy spirit is present and unruly
- It's complicated, beautiful and messy all at same time

Themes: How can we be constructive in living with our differences?

- Intentionally putting Christ in the center
- Choosing and celebrating diversity -- intentionally and with commitment
- Commitment to stay at the table
- Love and respect one another -- listen without judgment
- Finding methods to engage in our different stories -- taking on the responsibility to educate ourselves about race, class and economic issues
- Pay the theme team
- We need a strong center in order to embrace our diverse identities -- a common mission and vision that emerges from the whole and binds us together
- Listen. Learn. Change. Repeat.
- Diversity is complex and messy
- Diversity in action is: challenging, changing, disrupting, transforming structures and processes of power
- Creating "brave" spaces: acknowledging we'll make mistakes, accepting accountability

Themes: What can we take action on in response to the World's needs?

- Economic injustice: Confronting consumerism and addressing the disparity between poor and wealthy
- Immigration: tending to the undocumented
- Isolation. Loneliness. Individualism. Polarization. Fear.
 - Entering in to solidarity with those who are fearful, oppressed and vulnerable
 - Widening economic, political, and ideologicocial divisions
- Climate change/ care for creation
- Refugee crisis
- Racism
 - Racism connected to police brutality and mass incarceration
- Wars and violence
- Human rights -- women, people of color -- personal and institutional
- Interreligious relationship building (e.g. Muslims and Christians)

- Nationalism. We need to bear witness to the Beloved Community that Christ makes possible.
- Sexual violence
- Health crises -- including mental, physical, spiritual health and drug addiction-- as well as healthcare systems that are broken and inaccessible.
- Sharing the gospel and inviting people to a faith community following Jesus
- Loving your neighbor as yourself and love your enemy as your neighbor

Themes: What does it mean for us to follow Jesus as Anabaptists in the 21st Century?

- Create alternative, counter cultural communities
 - Live "upside-down" Kingdom - Sermon on Mount
 - Speak truth to power, stand with the marginalized, look for Jesus on the margins
 - The church witness should be the full shalom of God-- salvation, justice, and peace together.
- Bold humility in risk taking, in repentance, in hope -- living in joy and love as a demonstration of God's love
- Start with regular immersion in Scripture and contemplative prayer, intentionally nurturing maturing spirituality
- Be a "people of the book"- continue to be a biblically based church that studies the Bible together and discerns where the Spirit is moving. Scriptures that were referenced:
 - Sermon on the Mount, Jonah, Isaiah, Micah 6:8, Psalm 136, Matthew 5, Matthew 14:22-33, Matthew 25, Luke 4, Luke 8:43-48, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 16:1-13, Mark 2:1-12, Mark 6:31-44, John 4:1-42, John 12:1-8, Acts 10:1--11:18, Revelation 7:9, Jesus' parables and Paul & Barnabas
- Partner with other Anabaptists, other denominations and other groups in shared work -- we can't do it all ourselves.
- Learn from gifts and voices of global church
- Engage creation care issues locally, nationally and globally
- Look at our structures and be willing to try new things (such as this process) that bring new voices to the table.
- Evangelical faith

- Restorative justice approach in our work places, prison systems
- Act locally -- build relationships and meet needs in our local context

Themes: What do we gain with MCUSA?

- Community provides a sense of belonging, connection, family and dear friends
- Access to resources such as education, experience, wisdom and professional development, stewardship, mission opportunities, camps
 - Print materials like Leader, bulletins, Hymnal resources, and Sunday school materials
 - Salary and benefits guidelines, MLI database, covenant of understanding, ministerial handbook
 - Leadership development resources through colleges and universities and denomination
- Anabaptist Vision, Identity & Heritage
- Pastoral support, accountability, and resourcing
- Greater awareness of the perspectives and needs of the diverse parts of our body that aren't necessarily in local congregations
- Collective influence and impact
 - We have a bigger voice together to speak up on big issues (creation care, peace, missions)
- Like a marriage, some things would be easier to do on your own, but other things are done better even though there are some headaches along the way

Themes: Relating within a shared denomination

- A federation of conferences where the denominational office:
 - Coordinates support for the ministry of congregations (where the Spirit leads local discernment)
 - Nurtures relationship among conferences and congregations
 - Organizes joint ventures that promote our vision
 - Rework our confession of faith (e.g. Mennonite World Conference seven shared convictions)
 - Empower young adult involvement

- Values for our relationships
 - Jesus as center of our faith
 - Grace to one another
 - Trust in the way the Holy Spirit
 - Shared spiritual practices, shared stories, shared worship
 - Congregations relate to one another as adult siblings
- Yieldedness to God, trust in brave and generative faithfulness

Themes: Important things we do together

- Worship and sing together
- Share life together in community of faith
 - Eat together
 - Have fun and be joyful together
- Shared mission and engaging in service together
- Building relationships and sharing stories together
- Pray with and for each other
- Extend God's Shalom
- Grapple with our faith and with scripture -- Disagree together
- Engage in Mutual aid and support
- Continue to read scripture together
- Integrating difference through finding new ways of being and doing
- Work together for peace and justice, for example: addressing creation care and prison reform.
- Advocate and Protest
- Providing service and education opportunities for youth and young adults
- Doing good theology together
- Doing things together that we can't do alone