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 effects 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 ideologocial 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:

• 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