



A letter to Mennonite Church USA from participants of Hope for the Future 2018

“Are we at [conferences] to shake hands and take pictures? Are we in seminaries where we do our best to contain the spirit of God in words? Are we in churches where we sing and preach to people who have had the same name for generations? Are we preaching law and order and free enterprise in our peaceful congregations? Are we surrounded by the barricades of a status quo where we pray that the storm may pass so that we can continue living without disturbance? If we are satisfied to be busy with all those things in the midst of dying, disappointed insurrectionists, do we show our true face?”

– Vincent Harding, Mennonite World Conference, Amsterdam, 1967

Hope for the Future gatherings bring together leaders of color from across the church, sometimes with white allies, to explore the ways that power, privilege and racism function in our denomination. We are at a turning point in our history where the seeds that were sown generations ago with Vincent Harding and others, such as the Minorities Ministries Council, are bearing fruit. We realize the challenges that lie ahead. And so in the spirit of love, we offer these words of challenge and hope for the future.

We call all members, congregations and conferences of MC USA to:

Be centered in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. Too often we overemphasize the headiness of theological conversations to the neglect of the basics of the Gospel. We are followers of Jesus. Jesus is God incarnate. While theological conversation is important and necessary, we must also listen to our incarnational truth. As we are attentive, we will trust the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us in our journey together.

Love one another as Christ has loved us, despite our differences, acknowledging the reality of what our church is now, equally valuing the gifts of our diverse membership. In this time of divisiveness in our congregations, communities and our world, we must reject the demonic mindset of “us versus them.” For too long in our churches we’ve forced people to deny pieces of who they are for the sake of unity, rendering them invisible. We choose instead to see and value the *imago dei* in **all people**. We recognize that the thriving of our church hinges upon the embracing of this reality in Mennonite Church USA today.

Be visibly active in making a difference in the world. We have a powerful peace and justice witness. When we share it, it can transform systems and create new possibilities. We can be at the moral center of justice movements. But we must be willing to reach across faith, social class and ideological lines to partner with others.

Bring young people along as we journey together. The next generation of the church is now. We must continue to mentor young people and cultivate leadership in them. For Millennials and Generation Z, the church must be relevant, a place they want to be.

We have in front of us an opportunity for a renewed focus, rooted in our Anabaptist tradition — the willingness to be bold and different. To be bold and different in the spirit of the founders of our faith and the elders who, generations later, suffered in paving the way for us. Following Jesus is not easy. It will be painful. It will be costly. May we courageously conspire together, imagining what our work and legacy will be. Our hope lies in the future we create together — centered in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.”

— *Ephesians 4:4 NLT*

We pray for strength to be faithful to the call of God.

—Hope for the Future 2018 participants

(This letter was affirmed by 75 percent of those who attended. We did not hear from 25 percent of the participants, but agreed together if we received 75 percent affirmation, we would send the letter.)