A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan  
for Mennonite Church USA

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Desiring God’s Coming Kingdom
A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA
Approved by the Executive Board – February 25, 2014

Preface

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

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

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

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

The Executive Board guides the process of purposeful planning and decision making in such a way that the planning process is clear across the entire church. If individual delegates wish to give feedback to this plan, they may send an email to Ervin R. Stutzman, Executive Director, at ErvinS@MennoniteUSA.org or send responses by post to Mennonite Church USA, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.
There are two parts to this plan. Part One describes what we mean by “missional church,”
and sets forth our vision for becoming a missional church in all that we do. It also provides
a theological, biblical and practical rationale for planning in Mennonite Church USA
between now and the year 2020, beginning with an exposition of our denominational
statements of vision, purpose, and priorities.

Part One addresses the following three questions.

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

Part Two addresses the following three questions:

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

**PART ONE**

**OUR MISSIONAL VISION**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The goal of this transformation is “so that” God’s healing and hope will not only accomplish their transformative work in us, but also in the world. If God’s healing and hope are to connect with a broken and hurting world then it will require engagement with
that world. As followers of Jesus we will need to cross frontiers as he did in order to engage with those whom he loves and seeks to heal.

2. Where is God calling us to go?

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

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

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

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

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

Holistic Christian Witness:
The church exists for the task of bearing witness to the coming of Christ’s kingdom in the world. As missional communities we will share the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, help birth new communities of faith and reflect the reign of God by striving for peace and justice. Our allegiance to Jesus Christ calls us to pacifism, being willing to die rather than to kill even our enemies. The witness of congregations and the broader community of faith is expanded through institutional ministries that carry a shared and specialized mission on a collective basis beyond the capacity of any one congregation. (Matthew 12:15-21, Luke 4:18-21, John 20:21-22, Articles 10 and 22, Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective).
Stewardship:
In his words and practices, Jesus modeled an understanding that God is the Lord of all life. Thus, we are called to be stewards of all that God has generously entrusted to us for the sake of God’s purposes in the world. As missional communities we will assist every participant in our congregations to cultivate a healthy whole-life stewardship, to care for creation, to practice mutual aid and to be generous in ways which reflect the generosity of God. (Psalm 24:1-2, Proverbs 22:6-7, Luke 19:1-10, 2 Corinthians 8:5-7, 13-15; 9:6-15, Article 21, Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective).

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

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

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

3. What are the signposts to show we are on God’s chosen path for us?
One of the signs of a healthy church is that it helps bring forth new Christ-centered communities. Although not all growth is a sign of good health, vigorous missional churches bring forth new communities of faith in a variety of forms.

The following paragraphs describe twelve additional characteristics of missional churches, adapted here from material first provided by the Gospel and our Culture network. Each paragraph has a signpost to show what it might look like when a congregation or
community within Mennonite Church USA is on the path toward the destination to which
God has called us as a church.

1. Missional character trait: The missional church proclaims the Gospel.
   
   Signpost: The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of
different ways.

2. Missional character trait: The missional church is a community where all members
   are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
   
   Signpost: The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of
   all.

3. Missional character trait: The Bible is normative in this church's life. It sets the
   standard for our life as a people.
   
   Signpost: The church reads the Bible together in the light of Jesus Christ under the
guidance of the Holy Spirit to learn God's good and gracious intent for all creation,
the way of salvation, and the identity and purpose of life together.

4. Missional character trait: The church understands itself as different from the world
   because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
   
   Signpost: In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking
to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.

5. Missional character trait: The church seeks to discern God's specific missional
   vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
   
   Signpost: The church has made its ‘mission’ its priority, and in overt and
   communal ways is seeking to be and do ‘what God is calling us to know, be, and
do.’

6. Missional character trait: A missional community is indicated by how Christians
   behave toward one another.
   
   Signpost: Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in
   the locale characterize the generosity of the community.

7. Missional character trait: The members are engaged in a community that practices
   reconciliation and embraces the diversity that God has created here on earth.
   
   Signpost: The church community is moving beyond restricted cultural expressions
toward becoming a community that is more diverse in its racial, ethnic, age, gender
and socio-economic makeup.

8. Missional character trait: People within the community hold themselves
   accountable to one another in love.
   
   Signpost: Substantial time is spent with one another, building trust and holding
   ourselves accountable to each other in love.

   
   Signpost: Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central
   role.
10. Missional character trait: Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
   Signpost: There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.

11. Missional character trait: This community has a vital public witness.
   Signpost: The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.

12. Missional character trait: There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.
   Signpost: There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere—and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.

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

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

4. Where are we now on this journey?

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

Positive developments

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

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

Three important studies of Mennonite Church USA have helped to paint a picture of the trends and challenges that we face collectively as a church. Brief summaries of their findings are cited below.

**Denominational giving patterns:** In 2005, Michael Wiese and Richard L. Gerig conducted a research study of giving patterns in our denomination. They found that “theological and political views are an important explanation to differences in giving and attitudes toward Mennonite Church USA.” Those members who “insist on giving to denominational ministry, either through the congregation or directly, fit a general profile; they tend to be older, contribute out of a habit of giving in response to what God has given them, are denominationally oriented, and categorize themselves as ‘somewhat liberal’ theologically and politically.” Other interesting information that Wiese and Gerig provided included the fact that about 51% of the respondents categorized themselves as “conservative,” 45% as “liberal,” with the rest not choosing a category. According to the survey, there was no direct correlation between theological category and income level.

Wiese and Gerig also found that the relatively new concept of the “missional church” was taking root. Although they observed that the definition and significance of the word ‘missional’ needed further explanation, they found evidence that the focus was connecting at the congregational level and leading to new initiatives.

They discovered that many people, especially in the older generation, appreciate the theological underpinnings of “first fruits giving,” seeing it as a version of tithing. However, the “system that has been established to … implement ‘first fruits’ giving within Mennonite Church USA…is not currently understood or effective in funding the denomination.” We are not sure why this is the case. Perhaps the first fruits giving system was not introduced clearly enough or was never widely favored by the various entities of the church.

Finally, they reported that “People need to see tangible results from their giving—outcomes that matter and are documented and reported. Accountability from those receiving support is essential, including assurances that funds are being used wisely and efficiently.” The younger generation especially needs new “entry points” for giving. “Stories of changed lives and the evidence of ‘making a difference’ must be told in ways that excite the relational/experiential/pragmatic urges of young adults.”
This survey has significant insights for stewardship in all of the entities in our church—from congregations to the national conference. We have yet to fully implement the recommendations they had to offer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1972, 37 percent of Mennonites claimed no political party identity, compared with only 11 percent in 2006. Increases have occurred for both Republicans and Democrats. In 1972, 42 percent of Mennonites identified themselves as Republicans, compared with 50 percent in 2006. During this same period the proportion of Democrats nearly doubled, from 12 percent to 22 percent.
Kanagy concluded that the forces of modern and postmodern culture—professionalism, education, individualism and suburbanization—continue to shape Mennonites. We are more assimilated in the broader culture than before, and the increased identification of Mennonites with political parties threatens to polarize members around controversial issues.

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

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

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

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

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

The 2010 census also noted the rapidly continuing growth of the nonwhite population. Hispanics and Asians were the fastest growing demographic groups, with an increase of 42
percent since 2000. Hispanics now account for 1 out of 6 people in this nation, with 1 out of 4 children being Hispanic.

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

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

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

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

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

Along the same line, a dramatic shift in global weather patterns has raised deep concerns about a lack of water, leading to a food crisis with its most dramatic effect in the global south. In addition to these events, the disastrous April-July 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico brought renewed urgency to a creation care movement concerned about the
damage or depletion of natural resources. These disasters point to the importance of having Mennonite Church USA commit itself to increasing creation stewardship and to remain in vital partnership with relief and development agencies such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service. Environmental disasters provide significant opportunities for the church to engage in holistic witness.

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

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

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

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

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

Again, Mennonite Disaster Service was formed as a compassionate missional response to natural disasters. The programs that provided alternative service and disaster relief
benefited many who are not a part of Mennonite Church USA. They also had a significant impact on the volunteers who served, changing the way they view our church and the world.

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

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

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

6. What are the next steps on the path?

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

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

Alternate routes

As we envision the future of our church, we discern a number of strategic choices that lie before us. The direction that we choose at each of these junctures will shape our experience of the journey. We often live with tension between what seem like equally good choices. Yet in each of the pairs listed below, we believe that God is calling us to emphasize the first option as we pursue our missional calling.
**Common vision or Divisive issues** – The landscape of American society is changing dramatically through the impact of various movements—religious, educational, technological, generational and demographic. Our nation is deeply divided on issues such as abortion, health care, immigration policy, the role of the federal government, support of Israel/Palestine, and human sexuality, particularly same-sex relationships. Political parties often build their platform and/or policies around these divisive issues.

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

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

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

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

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

**Abundance or Scarcity** – One of the most often quoted verses among early Anabaptists was Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” It was a mandate to evangelize beyond the human boundaries of parish and nation-
state. But it was also an affirmation of the vast resources at God’s disposal, evoking a sense of God’s abundance and a mandate for Christian stewardship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soft or Hard geographical boundaries – All congregations in Mennonite Church USA belong to the national conference by virtue of belonging to an area conference. Most area conferences are roughly geographical in nature, although there is a good bit of overlap in
some regions. For various reasons, there are some congregations who have membership in conferences quite outside the region where they are located. In addition, there are Racial/Ethnic constituent groups whose congregational members are scattered across Mennonite Church USA.

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

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

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

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

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

**Polarities to manage**

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

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

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

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

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

We may well need to provide some new forms of training for lay leaders to help this happen. We have developed a “missional lens” that is being used to develop new leaders...
for the church in mission. This lens can provide the focus for lay leaders as well as pastors. Our seminaries are poised to assist in this quest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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:
- Develop resources for biblical/communal discernment to be used in congregations, area conferences, and other settings where believers seek to discern God’s will regarding important matters as a church (2015)
• Develop a covenant to express the relationship of the area conferences with the national conference and each other as an update to the Membership Guidelines (2015)

• Create a denominational statement of apology and a public service of lament for the abuses perpetrated by credentialed leaders in our denomination (2015)

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:**

- Convene a church planting summit to enable practitioners, area conference leaders, historians, missiologists and theologians to explore what we can learn from our past experiences in church planting and to discern God’s calling for the future (2015)

- Create a written resource that encourages reflection and action for incarnational, missional church development from an Anabaptist perspective (2016)

- Establish a network of pastors, spiritual directors and other qualified individuals to clarify core “spiritual practices of a peacemaker” (2015)

- Develop training and resources to equip congregations to build relationships with returning veterans (2013-2015)


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:**

- Provide stewardship training and education for immigrant congregations that are relevant to their context (2013-2015)

- Identify or develop websites that explain the stewardship implications of Anabaptist values for individuals and families and provide tools and resources for implementing them (2013-2015)

- Identify or develop resources to assist congregations and area conferences in creating and managing healthy financial plans for the future (2013-2015)

- Provide resources for congregational study via the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) to deepen our biblical understanding of creation care (2013-2015)

- Proactively assist young adults and young families with navigating the “new normal” economy as they deal with financial challenges (start in 2013)
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
Goals we intend to pursue:

- Collaborate with the planners of Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pa., to provide a wide and hospitable welcome for international guests to our 2015 biennial convention in Kansas City, Mo. (2013-2015)
- Complete the proposed covenant arrangement with the Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCo) (Mennonite Church in Congo) and complete context-specific guidelines for church-to-church relationships among Mennonite Church USA congregations, CMCo and Congo Evangelical Church (CEM) in conjunction with Congo church leaders (2015)
- Respond to the queries from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America about how we see our relationship to each other in the body of Christ, and to affirm the Mennonite World Conference–Lutheran World Federation dialogue on baptism (2013-2015)
- 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, Disciples and others) (2013-2016)
- Develop partnerships and alliances with historic African-American and Hispanic churches and faith organizations (from denominations and traditions other than Mennonite Church USA) to expose and engage the prison industrial complex and the system of mass incarceration/immigrant detention in our country (2013-2018)

Conclusion

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

For further reference:

“What is an Anabaptist Christian?” by Palmer Becker, Missio Dei publication number 18, Mennonite Mission Network.

Available for download on the Mennonite Church USA website:

● Research Study of Denominational Giving, Mennonite Church USA, April 9, 2005
http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/research-study-of-denominational-giving-in-
mennonite-church-usa/

Final note: This document was developed by Ervin R. Stutzman under the auspices of the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA. Stanley Green wrote the first draft of the response to questions 1 and 2 in Part 1. Since it was first shared publicly at the biennial convention in Pittsburgh in 2011, the document has incorporated changes suggested by the assembly delegates, the Constituency Leaders Council, the Governance Council, and the Executive Board.