A PROPOSAL OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION FUTURE CHURCH/SCHOOL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

For the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA, the Board of Directors of Mennonite Education Agency, and the Boards of Trustees of Mennonite Church USA colleges, universities, and seminaries

SEPTEMBER 27, 2017
MENNONITE EDUCATION AGENCY
3145 Benham Avenue, Suite 2, Elkhart, IN 46517
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BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

The Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) was formed with the birth of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) in 2002. It brought together the schools of the Higher Education Council of the former General Conference Mennonite Church and the schools of the Mennonite Board of Education of the former Mennonite Church. Because of diverse ways schools related to the church, statements of arrangements were developed in which schools had different relationships to the new church.

Since 2002, MC USA identity and practice has developed in ways that are different than either of the two former denominations. This shift has changed the dynamics of church and school relationships. These changes, along with questions raised by the higher education institutions, led to the appointment of a task force by the MEA to develop a revised statement of relationship between the church and higher education schools.

The MEA provides resources, programing and support to schools that empower teachers and administrators in the life-transforming work of education. The MEA links church and school together to ensure that students of all ages receive a quality Anabaptist Christian education. It works with PreK-12 schools, early learning centers, schools of higher learning, Hispanic ministries programs, scholarship programs, and in the investment of endowment funds for educational and other institutions.

Mennonite higher education has been shaped by a dynamic and evolving relationship with Mennonite Church USA. Mennonite higher education has significantly shaped the mission, vision and leadership of the church, and the church has shaped the identity and mission of the institutions. Each college, university, and seminary is distinctive and is committed to outstanding academics, professional practices, and faith formation in its students.

Anabaptist Christian in identity, these schools are warmly ecumenical. They welcome students from many denominations, non-denominational congregations, diverse world religions, and students who make no claims to faith. Through academic and student life programs, these schools encourage dialogue about faith, lifestyle, and cultivation of faith-based practices, including peacemaking.

The primary purpose of this proposed structure is to ensure the ongoing Anabaptist/Mennonite identity and mission of the schools of Mennonite Church USA, so that church and schools can continue to partner together in higher education. It seeks to describe and implement an adaptive and collaborative relationship for the church and schools that will support and accelerate a faithful Anabaptist witness in the world, even as the schools face and respond to rapid changes and evolving enrollment patterns.

As task force members, we submit this proposal to you for your prayerful consideration and await your comments to help the task force complete its assignment.

John Sheriff – Bethel College, Interim President
Evon Bergey – Eastern Mennonite University, Board Member
David Boshart – Moderator, MC USA
Yvonne Diaz – IMH
Ed Diller – Member, MC USA
Iris de León-Hartshorn – Executive Staff, MC USA

Kelvin Friesen – Hesston College, Board Chair
James Harder – Bluffton University, President
Marlene Kropf – MEA, Board Member
Faith Penner – Goshen College, Board Member
Sara Wenger Shenk – Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, President
Tom Stuckey – MEA, Board Member
Dick Thomas – Task Force Moderator

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VISION OF MENNONITE EDUCATION

The schools, with statements of arrangements to Mennonite Church USA, share the church’s commitment to Anabaptist values and theology. They are committed to a mutually beneficial and vital relationship with the church. They desire to maintain and grow their Anabaptist Christian identity as foundational for outstanding educational programs.

Through the MEA, MC USA partners with the schools by providing program support, prayers, finances, and guidance for educational programs. The schools partner with the church to serve as missional centers by providing a Christ-centered, value-laden educational formation that shapes graduates to become leaders for God’s reconciling mission in church and society, both locally and globally.

The schools work collaboratively to recruit students, provide rigorous academic programs, vocational and professional formation and job placement. They seek to be affordable, with a focus on faith formation that is informed by Anabaptist Christian values of service, social justice, witness, peacemaking, hospitality, prayer, and knowledge of the Scriptures.

As Christian faith-based learning communities, the schools make real the infinite worth and acceptance of every person. They endeavor to enact the biblical commandments to love God, self and neighbor and all of creation. They hold together – in creative tension – scholarship and faith, knowledge and love, wise judgment and welcoming embrace.

These schools form graduates who understand that the professional expression of their vocation will require deep roots in a living faith. Tackling the world’s toughest problems requires graduates to be grounded in the love of God and joyfully aligned with God’s reconciling mission in the world. They understand that character, accompanied by grace and humility, is more important than intellectual brilliance or professional success.

Inspired by the Gospel’s vision of the reign of God, graduates are equipped to embody Christ’s love, participate in and lead vibrant congregations, and witness to their faith. Within communities of learning, oriented toward biblical visions of shalom, they are formed in practices of nonviolence and peacebuilding and are prepared to confront racism and other forms of discrimination, practice restorative justice and offer hope for the healing of brokenness and division.
MENNONITE HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (MHEA or “Association”)

In relationship with the denomination’s education agency, MEA, the Mennonite Higher Education Association is a member-driven federation of Mennonite higher education schools that desire to maintain a close and intentional relationship to the Mennonite Church USA in ways described by a Statement of Arrangements (SOA). (NB: To avoid confusion with other institutions of the church such as MEA itself, the remainder of this document refers to our Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries collectively as “schools” rather than as “institutions”.) The MHEA partners with the MEA through a Statement of Arrangements that requires both parties’ agreement to change.

MHEA supports the missional vision of MC USA through higher education and is guided by the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, the Shared Convictions of Mennonite World Conference and other documents of MC USA. As valuable documents for framing teaching and learning, MHEA schools commit to using them as guides for educational formation. The schools also commit to examine how well time-bound confessions and convictions express the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures, and to actively listen for what the Spirit is saying to the church today.

Purpose

1. MHEA provides a structured setting for long-term mutual support and collaboration among Mennonite higher education schools. Within the MHEA framework, presidents meet regularly for fellowship, trust-building and collaboration, and for the sharing of goals, aspirations and challenges within a spirit of mutual support and encouragement. The Association carries out its activities with sensitivity to the uniqueness of the supporting constituencies of each member school.

2. In consultation with the MEA, the Association sets its agenda and priorities as determined by the members. It is anticipated that these will include:
   - working together to offer the highest academic and professional educational programs possible
   - developing additional collaboratively-delivered academic programs
   - advancing the mission and brand of Mennonite Higher Education to recruit larger numbers of students interested in such an education
   - sharing services for more efficient operation, professional enrichment, and other potential forms of collaboration to enhance educational outcomes and to keep tuition as affordable as possible
   - coordinating research and leadership development that serves the schools and/or church.

3. MHEA and member schools serve the church as an incubator of research-based Anabaptist theological perspectives and leadership development.

4. MHEA works with MEA, Mennonite Schools Council and other educational entities to advance the total scope of Mennonite education.

5. MHEA works in partnership with MEA to empower each school to eliminate structural racism and other forms of discrimination.

6. MHEA serves as a conduit between member schools/presidents and MEA. Toward that purpose, an MEA staff person designated by MEA will be invited to attend Association meetings to

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provide and receive information. In addition, an MEA staff person will be encouraged to attend at least one Board meeting of each of the schools annually in order to: emphasize and enhance the mutually supportive relationship between the church and school; facilitate and deepen personal relationships, which cross institutional lines and enable mutual sharing of advice, counsel and support between the church and the school, including mutual assistance on efforts to eliminate structural racism and other forms of discrimination. Arrangements for more frequent MEA presence in institutional board meetings may be made by any school in conversation with MEA.

**Organization of MHEA**

1. All current Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries with a Statement of Arrangement with Mennonite Church USA/MEA are members of MHEA. Future members of the MHEA require approval of both the MHEA and Mennonite Church USA (or its designee).
2. The president (chief administrator) of each member school serves as the official school representative in Association meetings with each member having equal weight in decision making and with the MEA staff representative having the right of consultation but no vote. The Association shall elect officers as needed from among its membership to carry out its vision.
3. The Association will meet at least two times per year and maintain a travel pool so that travel costs to meetings will be the same for each member school. The MEA staff member attending Association meetings will have the option to participate in the travel pool on an ongoing basis.
4. The Association will develop organization policies and structures to carry out its vision and mission as needed.
5. The Association will develop and assess its own budget according to its self-determined needs and priorities. It may choose to employ its own staff member(s), as needed, and/or to contract for specific services with MEA or other entities.

**Statement of Arrangement between MHEA and the MEA**

1. MHEA policies and actions will be determined by the Association in consultation with the MEA through its staff member attending Association meetings.
2. MHEA and MEA will consult with each other before either appoints staff to work with Mennonite higher education. The services provided by MEA to the Association and MSC member schools will be determined in conversations between the two organizations, and will be reviewed from time to time. Any desired change in the level of service should be communicated in adequate time to allow processing and planning.
3. MHEA will provide the MEA with MHEA minutes, proposals, enrollment information and other information needed to demonstrate that they are meeting the commonly held standards for an Anabaptist program of higher education. The MEA will provide MHEA member schools minutes, agenda and proposals that the MEA board is considering.
4. MHEA will seek the guidance of MEA when making decisions that may impact the church’s support of Mennonite higher education.
5. MHEA schools will provide agreed-upon tuition discounts between Mennonite higher education schools and MSC schools for students whose parents are employed in either.
6. MHEA will pay an annual support fee to the MEA for specific services rendered as initially negotiated between the two organizations as part of the approval process for this proposal.
fee will provide basic services. Additional services may be negotiated between MHEA or between individual schools and the MEA.

7. MEA will articulate the trends and issues within MC USA that might affect the future mission and operation of MHEA member institutions.

8. The MHEA and the MEA, in partnership with each other, may provide discussion forums and other cooperative activities for further development of the mission of Mennonite higher education and all of Mennonite education.
STATEMENT OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOOLS AND THE MENNONITE CHURCH USA/MEA

1. The school agrees that the Bible, when interpreted through the lens of Jesus’ life, teachings, death and resurrection, is the foundational authority for guiding their educational mission. Discerning the Bible’s meaning for different contexts and times requires prayerful, skilled, and humble work. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and *Mennonite World Conference Shared Convictions* offer community-discerned faith statements for particular times and contexts. These, along with other historic Mennonite confessions, provide rich layers of scriptural, practical and moral wisdom. The school agrees that these confessional documents are valuable for framing teaching and learning and commits to using them as guides for educational formation. The school also commits to examine how well time-bound confessions and convictions express the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures, and to actively listen for what the Spirit is saying to the church today.

2. A majority of board members at all times will be members of Mennonite Church USA congregations, appointed in consultation with MEA or other denominationally-connected entities (such as area conferences of MC USA, congregations, or program agencies that are part of MC USA). At least two board members included in that majority will be appointed by MC USA (or its designee), in consultation with the MHEA member school, and not more than two board members will be appointed by congregations. The method of appointment of a school’s board members and the entities which have the power of appointment shall be specified by such institution in its governance documents.¹

3. Presidential search committees shall include at least one member of the school’s Board of Trustees, selected by the school, who is a member of a Mennonite Church USA congregation, and two additional appointees (from the school’s board or beyond) of MC USA (or its designee – such as MEA), with one of them being a MEA board or staff member, who are nominated by MC USA or its designee in consultation with the school.²

4. The school will include in its articles of incorporation or bylaws the mission/purpose of the school, methodology of board member appointments and a provision that upon liquidation or cessation of business the schools remaining assets will be distributed to MC USA or its successor to be used to advance educational efforts in the church and a provision that these stipulations will not be modified without the approval of MC USA (or its designee – such as MEA).³

5. The school will identify as affiliated with MC USA on its website and the MEA and MC USA will endorse the school on their websites.

These arrangements may be reviewed at the request of either the MHEA or the MEA and may be changed with the agreement of both parties. If the parties cannot reach an agreement on a matter, the matter shall be referred to the Executive Board of MC USA or its designee for mediation and resolution of the disagreement.

¹ Individual schools can make arrangements with MEA for additional board appointments, including maintaining the present arrangements.
² Since AMBS is a bi-national seminary, there are separate agreements with MC Canada related to board appointments, liquidation of assets, by-laws and agreements such as website.
³ Since AMBS is a bi-national seminary, there are separate agreements with MC Canada related to board appointments, liquidation of assets, by-laws and agreements such as website.
FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. Current intentions are that the initial cost to schools will not be higher than the current support payment the schools pay to the MEA; and efforts will be made to provide reductions in support fees.

2. Changes in the support payments from the schools to the MEA will be determined through conversation and agreement between the MHEA and the MEA, and will be based in part on the services the MHEA and MHEA schools request from the MEA.

3. The MEA and MHEA will consult and agree on changes in the basic services provided to the schools through the regular support fees paid to the MEA and services the MEA provides on a fee for service basis.

4. Future additional collaborative work may result in increased fees to support the MEA or the MHEA. However, an incidental impact of more collaborative work may result in decreases in some of the school’s budget lines and/or may allow the schools to achieve greater benefits at lower costs than if the schools continued to work individually.
Response to the proposal concerning the future relationship between Mennonite Higher Education Institutions and MC USA
Presented by the Higher Education Future Church/School Relations Committee

As you review the draft proposal put forth by the Higher Education Future Church/School Relations Committee, we invite your institution to use this guide to record your responses. This form is intended to serve as an institutional response and not as an individual response. Please return this form to Twila Albrecht at TwilaA@MennoniteEducation.org. Thank you!

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<tr>
<th>Name of Person Completing the Form</th>
<th>Institutional Board/Organization</th>
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1) What areas of the proposal do you affirm?

2) What areas of the proposal cause concern?

3) What areas would you like to see addressed that are presently not included?

4) What recommendations do you have for strengthening the proposal?

5) What questions do you have?

6) Are there any additional comments your institution/organization would like to share with the Higher Education Future Church/School Relations Committee?