



**Mission Statement:** *MEA will strengthen Mennonite education for restorative leadership, work, and service throughout the church and the world.*

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Pastor

## **Prayer requests for a weary land**

As we all know, the hardships from 2020 have shaken us deeply. Race-based brutality and injustice, political unrest and violence, and a year of quarantine, masks, sickness and death. Our very souls cry out in fear and weariness. For Anabaptist Christians, Jesus is our rock in a weary land, a chorus I remember well from my childhood. In these weary times, we are more grateful than ever for the Anabaptist-Mennonite ties that bind us together as a community of believers. Our schools are forming students in ways that are distinctively Anabaptist, following the **Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective** and the **Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists**. We believe these foundations will be a rock in a weary land for our students throughout their lives. Join us in prayer for our students and schools, that they would seek God, our shelter in this time of storm. To join us in praying in specific ways for our schools, consider subscribing to MEA's monthly **Prayers for Mennonite Education** by emailing [JoleneV@MennoniteEducation.org](mailto:JoleneV@MennoniteEducation.org)

## **Connections**

**Bethany Christian Schools and Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana**, have strong student populations from CDC congregations, such as Assembly, Faith and Silverwood Mennonite churches in the Goshen area. A highlight is the "farm to cafeteria table" experience in which biology students from Bethany spent a day in October at Goshen College's Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center to engage with local farming and explore sustainable food systems. This included butchering chickens for a farm-to-table meal!

**Eastern Mennonite School (EMS) in Harrisonburg, Virginia**, has been in close partnership with Shalom Mennonite Church, a CDC congregation known for its deep stewardship commitments to human and material resources. Shalom has used the EMS dining hall for worship and they have partnered together on a number of mutually beneficial projects: building shared storage spaces, purchasing chairs, sound systems and pianos. EMS' solar energy project was a particular highlight for this relationship. This solar "barn-raising" was coordinated by a Shalom member and installed 357 panels in less than five hours. The array offsets nearly one-third of the total electricity used by the school's facilities. It also generates enough clean energy to run the equivalent of 15 average homes and avoids more than 141 tons of carbon dioxide pollution per year. Shalom members gave generously to this project.

## **Cross-Agency Action with Mennonite Mission Network (MMN)**

We know that when young people participate in Mennonite service opportunities and/or attend Mennonite schools, they are more likely to attend Mennonite congregations as adults. Mennonite education and service work are formational opportunities, as many leaders in the church can attest from personal experience. **MEA and MMN are partnering to promote both Mennonite education and service as a recommended vocational path.** Toward this goal, we are exploring how to pool resources and share this message, not only with Mennonite youth and their families, but also with the schools and congregations. This joint venture includes securing college credit for service and reviving the Youth Census:

- MEA has coordinated with the schools' admissions staff and registrars to help three participants with MMN's Service Adventure program complete the necessary enrollment requirements at MEA-affiliated schools. MEA and MMN will be sharing more about how to earn college credit through service at the MC USA convention this summer.

- The schools and service programs rely on data from MEA's congregational Youth Census to communicate critical information and opportunities to students and families. The Census is a family's gateway to formational opportunities in Mennonite education and service, so **please communicate with your congregations the importance of sharing youth data with MEA.**

### **Hispanic Ministries Education partnerships**

MEA operates the Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (SeBAH) program, which offers strong biblical and Anabaptist-based theological education for Hispanic leaders in the Mennonite church that is both affordable and accessible. In the past year, SeBAH has secured partnerships with Hesston (Kansas) College and Palm Beach (Florida) Atlantic University (PBA), enabling SeBAH graduates to earn transfer credits and automatic admission. PBA is also offering scholarships of up to \$1,100 per semester. SeBAH is pursuing a similar agreement with Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, an MEA-affiliated seminary. These partnerships strengthen the Hispanic Ministries program and offer Hispanic students access to broader educational opportunities within the denomination and beyond, many of whom pay their own way at great sacrifice.

### **Mennonite Higher Education Agency (MHEA)**

**Board chair gatherings:** At their request, MEA is facilitating virtual, quarterly gatherings of the higher ed board chairs. MEA is uniquely positioned to offer connection and support to this group, both individually and collectively.

**Theological Education committee:** Some Conference Ministers have raised concern about the waning interest in biblical and ministry studies. They asked, "**From where will our pastors and church leaders come?**" This committee is studying the barriers to ministry and how to create new and accessible pathways to strong Anabaptist theological and biblical education. The committee includes the following people: **David Boshart**, president of AMBS; **John Powell**, pastor and teacher; **Jolene VonGuten**, executive assistant for MEA (recorder and administrative support); **Marco Güete**, director of Hispanic Ministries Education for MEA; **Michael Danner**, associate executive director of Church Vitality for MC USA; **Michele Hershberger**, professor and department chair of Bible and Ministry at Hesston College; **Nancy Heisey**, associate dean of Eastern Mennonite Seminary; **Sarah Nahar**, doctoral student of religion and environmental studies; **Tom Stuckey**, interim executive director and CEO for MEA.

### **Mennonite Schools Council (MSC)**

The administrators for preK-12 schools are being regularly resourced, both individually and collectively, by MEA Interim Director for preK-12 Schools Dawn Graber. Dawn offers a background in executive coaching to help leaders clarify their values and vision and to test and discern next steps to meet their personal and organizational goals. There has been strong interest in individual coaching sessions with Dawn. In addition, she has helped plan and coordinate virtual professional development experiences on a bi-monthly basis about relevant and emergent subjects, such as navigating polarization on campuses, emotional Intelligence, and how self-aware leaders can help create effective and influential relationships.

### **Washington Community Scholars' Center (WCSC)**

MEA is partnering with the Washington Community Scholars' Center to draw more interest and enrollment from students across Anabaptist-Mennonite education. WCSC is a cross-cultural urban studies, internship, and community living experience located in the nation's capital, operated by Eastern Mennonite University. For a semester or the summer, the Center offers career building and vocational reflection through local internships, interactive coursework engaging with the city and the forces that shape it, living in intentional community and building social leadership skills, and navigating new experiences in a diverse urban setting. **The program is not limited to EMU students;** in fact, Bethel College and Bluffton University regularly send students to WCSC. MEA is helping to extend the invitation to all of the Anabaptist-Mennonite higher ed schools as well as high schools.

### **Anti-racism and Anti-Oppression**

The MEA staff and board are committed to dismantling racism and oppression. As a step in our individual journeys and to broaden our understandings collectively, the MEA staff studied the book **Who Will Be A Witness?** by **Drew Hart** and published

by Herald Press. Studying this book together has been meaningful and illuminating for the MEA staff, and we would encourage your congregations – small groups, Sunday school classes – to consider a similar book study.

**Executive Director Search**

A search committee is working to find the next Executive Director/CEO. Dick Thomas, the MEA Board chair and chair of the committee, worked to include a broad and inclusive range of voices: **Addie Banks**, MEA Board member; **Jon Carlson**, MC USA Executive Board member and Pastor of Forest Hills Mennonite Church; **Marco Güete**, Director of MEA’s Hispanic Ministries Education programs; **Glen Guyton**, MC USA Executive Director (ex officio); **Lisa Heinz**, MEA Staff; **Joe Manickam**, President of Hesston College and representing the Mennonite Higher Education Association; **Carol Roth**, Moderator of the Racial Ethnic Council; **Conrad Swartzentruber**, Superintendent at Dock Mennonite Academy and representing the Mennonite Schools Council; **Dick Thomas** (Chair), MEA Board Chair; **Jolene VonGunten** (Committee Staff), MEA Staff. We hope to have a candidate selected by the summer. **Please join us in praying for the committee and ask God to call the right person to lead the agency.**

**On behalf of the MEA board and staff, thank you for the many ways you support Mennonite education.**

*Submitted by Tom Stuckey, Interim Executive Director and CEO  
March 2021*

*TS/jvg*