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

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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

JANUARY 30, 2018

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL**

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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 group 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 MC 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 schools. 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 and lifestyle, and cultivate 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 MC 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.

The MEA also faces challenges and new opportunities in a rapidly changing church that requires it to have increased flexibility as it moves from focusing on governance of schools to embracing new and emerging partners to meet their educational needs. The changes envisioned in the following document should strengthen both the schools and the MEA, and thus the ministry of Mennonite Church USA.

We are grateful for the feedback received from all the schools, MCUSA Executive Board and MEA Board to the first draft of the proposal. The group discussed the feedback and incorporated much of it into the final draft. As Task Force members we submit this final draft of the proposal to you for your prayerful consideration and action.

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|---|--|
| 1 Evon Bergey – Eastern Mennonite         | 12 Iris de León-Hartshorn – Executive Staff, |
| 2 University, Board Member                | 13 MC USA                                    |
| 3 David Boshart – Moderator, MC USA       | 14 Marlene Kropf – MEA, Board Member         |
| 4 Yvonne Diaz- IMH                        | 15 Faith Penner – Goshen College, Board      |
| 5 Ed Diller – Member, MC USA              | 16 Member                                    |
| 6 Kelvin Friesen – Hesston College, Board | 17 Sara Wenger Shenk – Anabaptist            |
| 7 Chair                                   | 18 Mennonite Biblical Seminary, President    |
| 8 Jon Gering – Bethel College, President  | 19 John Sheriff, Bethel College, Interim     |
| 9 (January 2018)                          | 20 President (July 2017-December 2017)       |
| 10 James Harder – Bluffton University,    | 21 Tom Stuckey – MEA, Board Member           |
| 11 President                              | 22 Dick Thomas – Task group Moderator        |

## 23 **VISION OF MENNONITE EDUCATION**

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

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

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

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

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

46 Inspired by the Gospel's vision of the reign of God, graduates are equipped to embody Christ's  
 47 love, participate in and lead vibrant congregations, and witness to their faith. Within  
 48 communities of learning, oriented toward biblical visions of shalom, they are formed in practices  
 49 of nonviolence and peacebuilding and are prepared to confront racism and other forms of  
 50 discrimination, practice restorative justice and offer hope for the healing of brokenness and  
 51 division.

## 52 **MENNONITE HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (MHEA or “Association”)**

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

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

### 68 **Purpose**

- 69 1. MHEA provides a structured setting for long-term mutual support and collaboration  
70 among Mennonite higher education schools. Within the MHEA framework, presidents  
71 meet regularly for fellowship, trust-building and collaboration, and for the sharing of  
72 goals, aspirations and challenges within a spirit of mutual support and encouragement.  
73 The Association carries out its activities with sensitivity to the uniqueness of the  
74 supporting constituencies of each member school.
- 75 2. In consultation with the MEA, the Association sets its agenda and priorities as  
76 determined by the members. It is anticipated that these will include:
  - 77 • working together to offer the highest academic and professional educational  
78 programs possible
  - 79 • developing additional collaboratively-delivered academic programs
  - 80 • advancing the mission and brand of Mennonite Higher Education to recruit  
81 larger numbers of students interested in such an education
  - 82 • sharing services for more efficient operation, professional enrichment, and  
83 other potential forms of collaboration to enhance educational outcomes and  
84 to keep tuition as affordable as possible
  - 85 • coordinating research and leadership development that serves the schools  
86 and/or church.
- 87 3. MHEA and member schools serve the church as an incubator of research-based  
88 Anabaptist theological perspectives and leadership development.
- 89 4. MHEA works with MEA, Mennonite Schools Council and other educational entities to  
90 advance the total scope of Mennonite education.

- 91 5. MHEA works in partnership with MEA to empower each school to eliminate structural  
92 racism and other forms of discrimination.
- 93 6. MHEA serves as a conduit between member schools/presidents and MEA. Toward that  
94 purpose, an MEA staff person designated by MEA will be invited to attend Association  
95 meetings to provide and receive information

96 **Organization of MHEA**

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

115

116 **Statement of Arrangements between MHEA and the MEA**

- 117
- 118 1. MHEA policies and actions will be determined by the Association in consultation with the  
119 MEA through its staff member attending Association meetings.
- 120
- 121 2. MHEA and MEA will consult with each other before either appoints staff to work with  
122 Mennonite higher education. The services provided by MEA to the Association will be  
123 determined in conversations between the two organizations, respectively, and will be  
124 reviewed from time to time. Any desired change in the level of service should be  
125 communicated in adequate time to allow processing and planning.
- 126
- 127 3. MHEA will provide the MEA with MHEA minutes, proposals, enrollment information and  
128 other information needed to demonstrate that they are meeting the commonly held  
129 standards for an Anabaptist program of higher education. The MEA will provide MHEA  
130 member schools minutes, agenda and proposals that the MEA board is considering.
- 131

- 132 4. MHEA will seek the guidance of MEA when making decisions that may impact the  
133 church's support of Mennonite higher education.  
134
- 135 5. MHEA schools will provide agreed-upon tuition discounts between Mennonite higher  
136 education schools and MSC schools and MEA staff for students whose parents are  
137 employed in either.  
138
- 139 6. In return for a support fee, the MEA will provide specific services to MHEA, and MHEA  
140 will pay an annual support fee to the MEA for specific services rendered, as initially  
141 negotiated between the two organizations as part of the approval process for this  
142 proposal. This fee will provide for basic services by MEA. Additional services may be  
143 negotiated between MHEA or between individual schools and the MEA.  
144
- 145 7. MEA will articulate the trends and issues within MC USA that might affect the future  
146 mission and operation of MHEA member institutions.  
147
- 148 8. The MHEA and the MEA, in partnership with each other, may provide discussion forums  
149 and other cooperative activities for further development of the mission of Mennonite  
150 higher education and all of Mennonite education.  
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166 **STATEMENT OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOOLS AND THE**  
167 **MENNONITE CHURCH USA/MEA**

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168 Each school desiring to be a school of Mennonite Church USA will have an SOA with the church  
169 that will be reviewed every five years to keep it current, and to nurture a strong church and  
170 school relationship. The review of the SOA and changes in church and school relationship will  
171 be initiated and signed by the Mennonite Education Agency on behalf of Mennonite Church  
172 USA. (The first review will start July of 2020 and then every five years thereafter). SOAs may  
173 be amended or modified with, and only with, the approval of both parties.

174 The MEA and the schools will maintain two-way communication to build a strong and synergistic  
175 partnership. A MEA staff person will be encouraged to attend at least one Board meeting of  
176 each of the schools annually in order to: emphasize and enhance the mutually supportive  
177 relationship between the church and school; facilitate and deepen personal relationships, and  
178 enable mutual sharing of advice, counsel and support between the church and the school,  
179 including mutual assistance on efforts to eliminate structural racism and other forms of  
180 discrimination. Arrangements for more frequent MEA presence in institutional board meetings  
181 shall be made by any school in conversation with MEA or suggested to a school by the MEA.

182 **The SOA**

- 183 1. The school agrees that the Bible, when interpreted through the lens of Jesus' life,  
184 teachings, death and resurrection, is the foundational authority for guiding their  
185 educational mission. Discerning the Bible's meaning for different contexts and times  
186 requires prayerful, skilled, and humble work. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite*  
187 *Perspective* and *Mennonite World Conference Shared Convictions* offer community-  
188 discerned faith statements for particular times and contexts. These, along with other  
189 historic Mennonite confessions, provide rich layers of scriptural, practical and moral  
190 wisdom. The school agrees that these confessional documents are valuable for framing  
191 teaching and learning and commits to using them as guides for educational formation. The  
192 school also commits to examine how well time-bound confessions and convictions express  
193 the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures, and to actively listen for what the Spirit is  
194 saying to the church today.  
195
- 196 2. A majority of board members at all times will be members of Mennonite Church USA  
197 congregations, appointed in consultation with MEA or other denominationally-connected  
198 entities (such as area conferences of MC USA, congregations, or program agencies that  
199 are part of MC USA). At least two board members included in that majority will be  
200 appointed by MC USA (or its designee), and not more than two board members will be  
201 appointed by congregations.<sup>1</sup> The method of appointment of a school's board members

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<sup>1</sup> Individual schools can make arrangements with MEA for additional board appointments, including maintaining the present arrangements.



202 and the entities which have the power of appointment shall be specified by such institution  
203 in its governance documents.<sup>2</sup>  
204

205 3. Presidential search committees shall include at least one member of the school's Board of  
206 Trustees, selected by the school, who is a member of a Mennonite Church USA  
207 congregation, plus two additional persons (MC USA Persons) nominated by MC USA (or  
208 its designee, such as MEA) and appointed by the school. One of the MC USA persons  
209 shall be a member of the MEA Board or MEA staff.<sup>3</sup>  
210

211 4. The school will include in its articles of incorporation or bylaws the mission/purpose of the  
212 school (in general), the methodology of board member appointments and a provision that  
213 upon liquidation or cessation of business the schools' remaining assets will be distributed  
214 to MC USA or its successor to be used to advance educational efforts in the church (the  
215 following provision will be included in the Bylaws for AMBS, Eastern Mennonite University,  
216 Goshen College and Hesston College that these stipulations will not be modified without  
217 the approval of MC USA [or its designee - such as MEA]; the following provision will be  
218 included in the Bylaws for Bethel College and Bluffton University, that these stipulations  
219 will not be modified without consultation with MC USA [or its designee - such as MEA]).<sup>4</sup>  
220

221 5. The school will identify as affiliated with MC USA on its website and the MEA and MC USA  
222 will endorse the school on their websites.  
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<sup>2</sup> For AMBS, the majority of board members shall come from MC Canada and MC USA. Given that five are appointed by MC Canada, at least five, in addition to the two MEA appoints, shall be from MC USA congregations. The total number of AMBS board directors is fifteen.

<sup>3</sup> For AMBS, MC Canada appoints one or two representatives to the presidential search committee.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

239 **FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS**

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- 240 1. Current intentions are that the initial cost to schools funding MEA and MHEA will not be  
241 higher than the current support payment the schools pay to the MEA; and efforts will be  
242 made to provide reductions in support fees.  
243
- 244 2. Changes in the support payments from the schools to the MEA will be determined  
245 through conversation and agreement between anticipated members of the MHEA (Beta  
246 MHEA) and the MEA (with Executive Board involvement) and will be based in part on  
247 the services the MHEA and MHEA schools request from the MEA.  
248
- 249 3. The MEA and MHEA will agree on the basic services provided to the schools through  
250 the regular support fees paid to the MEA. This discussion will happen in the Beta MHEA  
251 meeting.  
252
- 253 4. Individual schools may contract with the MEA for services they desire the MEA to  
254 provide beyond the services/support/advancement provided for all MHEA member  
255 schools.  
256
- 257 5. Future additional collaborative work may result in increased fees to support the MEA or  
258 the MHEA. However, an incidental impact of more collaborative work may result in  
259 decreases in some of the school's budget lines and/or may allow the schools to achieve  
260 greater benefits at lower costs than if the schools continued to the work individually.  
261
- 262 6. Schools will pay a support fee to the MEA and may also assess a fee to be paid to the  
263 MHEA for collaborative work. Part of this fee may be in the cost of shared staff provided  
264 by a school to MHEA collaborative work.  
265

266 **IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE & STEPS FOR THE MHEA: Fiscal Discernment and the**  
267 **New SOA's**

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- 269 1. A Beta MHEA will begin operation on February 1, 2018. Dick Thomas will serve as  
270 convener of the **Beta** meetings and will lead the group in deciding the president who will  
271 chair the association beginning July 1, 2018 and officers desired by the MHEA other  
272 than the chair.  
273
- 274 2. The Beta MHEA will consist of four new Presidents and two experienced presidents, one  
275 of whom will no longer be a Mennonite School President after June 30, 2018. The first  
276 order of business of the MHEA will be to get to know each other.  
277
- 278 3. The second order of business will be to discuss vision and the real possibilities of the  
279 MHEA to transform and bring increased fiscal integrity to MHEA schools with vision  
280 sharing initially by James Harder, Sara Wenger Shenk and Dick Thomas.  
281
- 282 4. The third order of business of the MHEA will be to list and discuss current collaborative  
283 programs/ventures among the schools.  
284
- 285 5. The fourth order of business will be to learn about and understand the current initiatives  
286 and work of the MEA on behalf of Mennonite Higher Education specifically and

- 287 Mennonite Education generally that includes all levels of education, including higher  
288 education.  
289
- 290 6. The fifth order of business will be to look at the cost of the current work of the MEA on  
291 behalf of higher education and to decide which parts of the work the schools of the  
292 association desire to continue and for which they are willing to finance as part of their  
293 support payment to the MEA. This discussion will also include work that the MEA board  
294 or the Executive Board deem to be essential as well as any new support/initiatives the  
295 MHEA is requesting of the MEA.  
296
- 297 7. The sixth order of business will be to negotiate a fee that each school will pay to the  
298 MEA based on the agreement with the individual school and the services/support  
299 requested by the MHEA. This agenda will review the unified giving plan and decide if it  
300 makes sense in the ways the church has changed since its development by the  
301 Mennonite Board of Education of the former Mennonite Church. David Boshart as  
302 moderator of Mennonite Church USA will be present at this meeting and Lisa Heinz will  
303 be present as the CFO of the MEA to provide detail and to answer specific fiscal  
304 questions.  
305
- 306 8. The seventh order of business will be to review the connections of the MEA Investment  
307 Committee to the MEA, the MHEA and the schools.  
308
- 309 9. School boards and the MEA board will review any revised proposed SOA at their winter  
310 meeting and agree to sign any agreed upon revised SOA by June 1, 2018, to be  
311 effective July 1, 2018.  
312
- 313 10. An MEA representative will meet with each school board between January 1, 2018 and  
314 July 1, 2018 to be in conversation with each other about the new SOA between the  
315 school and the MEA and the role and purpose of the MHEA.  
316
- 317 11. The new SOA between the MHEA and the MEA will become effective July 1, 2018. The  
318 SOA will be signed and dated by the board chair and president of the school and the  
319 board chair and CEO of the Mennonite Education Agency.  
320
- 321 12. On July 1, 2018 the Beta MHEA become the MHEA and will become fully operational.  
322
- 323 13. The support fees schools will pay to MEA for the 2018-19 school year will be reduced by  
324 at least 5% compared to the 2017-18 fees. For budgetary reasons, MEA must have a  
325 sense of the parameters of expectations, and the MHEA expectations for programming  
326 need to be considered.  
327
- 328 14. The new support fee schedule will go into effect for the 2019-20 school year.  
329

330 **Other**

331 Based on a number of suggestions, it is recommended that the MEA consider a reduction in its  
332 board size. There were also suggestions that some of the schools should consider a reduction  
333 in their board size.