

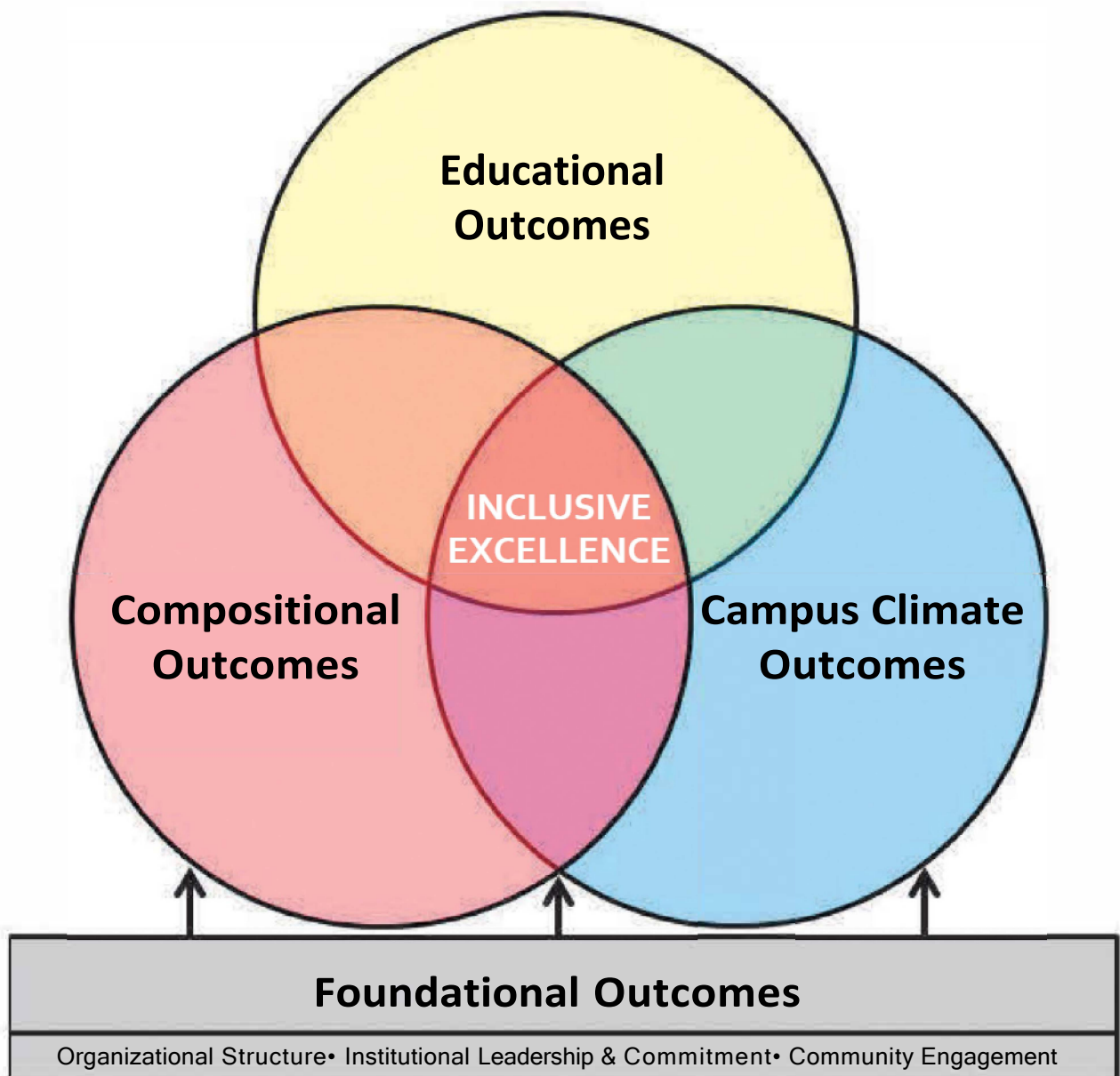
# Journeying Toward Reconciliation Together

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

2022-2023

## THEMES OF THE PLAN

1. Foundational Outcomes
2. Compositional Outcomes
3. Campus Climate Outcomes
4. Educational Outcomes



## **Reconciliation and Messiah University: Pursuing our Christ-Centered Calling**

**George Pickens, Emerson Powery, and Cynthia Wells<sup>1</sup>**

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.*

2 Corinthians 5:17-20a

Reconciliation is at the heart of Christianity, the “inspiration and focus of the Christian faith”<sup>2</sup>. A biblical teaching, an action and a process, reconciliation is grounded in the conviction that through Jesus Christ God has made peace with and between humanity and all creation. The embodiment of this alternative way of being, living and relating is a test of the Gospel’s presence in the world, and a most valuable and hopeful contribution Christianity can make to the world.

The journey toward reconciliation is central to Messiah University. The three theological strands that inform Messiah’s identity all emphasize reconciliation, proclaiming and demonstrating the need and promise for individuals to be reconciled with God and with each other.<sup>3</sup> Messiah’s “embracing evangelical spirit” proclaims its intention to demonstrate the good

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<sup>1</sup> This document draws inspiration and content from previous statements. Material in this document draws on the “Educational Commitment to Reconciliation”, authored by Lawrence Burnley, Eldon Fry, Douglas Jacobsen, Kim S. Phipps, and David Weaver-Zercher (Grantham, PA: Messiah College, 2009). This document also draws on the contextual statement for the Diversity Strategic Plan, authored and subsequently revised by the Diversity Committee with leadership from Cynthia A. Wells and Bernardo Michael.

<sup>2</sup> *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* by John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 44. As an additional note, this book has been very helpful and its influence is evident throughout.

<sup>3</sup> These theological strands are the Pietist, Wesleyan and Anabaptist Christian traditions. See [https://www.messiah.edu/info/20265/the\\_three\\_traditions\\_that\\_shape\\_our\\_mission\\_and\\_why](https://www.messiah.edu/info/20265/the_three_traditions_that_shape_our_mission_and_why). Even though members of these Christian traditions used different terms to talk about reconciliation, they nevertheless understood and proclaimed that the Gospel provided the possibility for individuals to be “put right” with God and with each other.

news of reconciliation through cultivating a welcoming and gracious environment, and its mission is to be a formative community for the work of reconciliation.

The term reconciliation is embedded in Messiah's foundational documents. The fifth of the University's five foundational values depicts reconciliation as central to the Gospel and links reconciliation with an ethic of service and the pursuit of justice.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, reconciliation appears prominently in the University's statement of mission: *Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society.*

Because the work of reconciliation is so deeply embedded in its past and present, Messiah University's journey toward reconciliation with God, each other and with all creation is essential to the faithful fulfillment of its identity and mission.

### **Reconciliation: A Biblical Story**

The Bible testifies to the story of reconciliation between God and the world. It is also a witness to reconciliation between God and individuals, among people and groups, as well as with all of creation.<sup>5</sup>

In Genesis, God established a covenant with Abraham to make "a great nation" and to bless "all the families of the earth."<sup>6</sup> Despite many ethnic conflicts between Israel and other inhabitants, the Abrahamic covenant establishes a blessing on all peoples of the earth. As a sign of this covenant, the Law testifies to this commitment: to grant fair wages to poorer Israelites and

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<sup>4</sup> Messiah University. "Foundational Values", [https://www.messiah.edu/info/20003/faith\\_and\\_values/7/foundational\\_values](https://www.messiah.edu/info/20003/faith_and_values/7/foundational_values)

<sup>5</sup> "Christianity did not begin with a confession. It began with an invitation into friendship, into creating a new community, into forming relationships based on love and service." – Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:1-3

immigrants (Lev 19:10; Deut 24:14); to seek the benefits of the Sabbath for all (Exod 20:10); to include non-Israelites in Israel's worship practices (Num 9:14; 15:14-16). The story of "Ruth" is a classic example, in which a Moabite woman cared for her widowed Israelite mother-in-law and, eventually, became an ancestor of Israel's most memorable king, David.<sup>7</sup>

The Prophets attempted to hold Israel accountable to God's covenant. Their charge associates fair treatment of the "immigrant" (CEB)<sup>8</sup> along with acts of kindness toward the Israelite widow and orphan (Jer 7:6; 22:3; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). Several prophets envisioned the Lord's Temple as a place of reconciliation for all nations (Isa 56:7; Zech 8:23). The prophets envisioned a future in which God – who loves justice (Isa 61:8) – places God's spirit on the people of God to bind up broken hearts (61:1), to restore cities (61:4), and to remember that the earth's fruitfulness is a sign of the Lord's righteousness (61:11).<sup>9</sup>

Jesus stands firmly on the side of the prophets of reconciliation. His life and death epitomize God's redemptive love for the world. While the Gospels emphasize a mission to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 10:6; 15:24), Jesus's broadmindedness allowed him to recognize the good work of other exorcists among Israel.<sup>10</sup> He also initiated activities among non-Jews. He healed one enslaved to a Gentile centurion.<sup>11</sup> He cast out a demon from a non-Jewish Gerasenean.<sup>12</sup> At the behest of a persistent Syro-Phoenician woman, he healed her daughter from afar.<sup>13</sup> These actions symbolize explicitly what it meant to love God and to love neighbor as the greatest human pursuits.

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth 4:13-17

<sup>8</sup> Other English Bibles translate the Hebrew word *gēr* as "alien" (NRSV), "foreigner" (NIV), or "sojourner" (ESV).

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 61

<sup>10</sup> Mark 9:38-41

<sup>11</sup> Luke 7: 1-10. The Roman centurion was a generous benefactor of the local Jewish community.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 5: 1-20

<sup>13</sup> Mark 7: 24-30

Moreover, Gentile inclusion energized Paul's mission.<sup>14</sup> Paul recalls one of the grand confessions of the early church – a confession offered at its baptismal ceremonies: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> The confession confirmed that reconciliation between divided groups was central to the development of the new religious movement.

Paul's letters witness to the theological claim that the first movement of reconciliation was God's action: God reached out and reconciled us.<sup>16</sup> The second act proceeds naturally from the first. God reconciled us so that we would continue the “ministry of reconciliation.” God seeks out agents of change, people willing to continue the work of peacemaking, showing mercy to others, and expressing passion for justice. In 2 Cor 5:20, we come closest to Paul's language of the human-to-human encounter, in which “God is making his appeal [to you] through us.” Notably, Paul sent this letter not to unbelievers but rather to the Christ-following Corinthian community, some of whom opposed Paul's view of how to live out their faith. This was a letter of reconciliation between two Christ-following communities, a Pauline one and a Corinthian one.

As people of faith, we confess that the overarching storyline of the Bible is one in which God desires to create a people with whom God remains in covenant relationship and that relationship requires people of various theological commitments – and, perhaps, those who have no commitment at all – to reconcile with one another. Indeed, the Church has been commissioned to be the agent of God's work for reconciliation in the world.

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<sup>14</sup> Gal 3:8-9

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

## **Reconciliation and Christian History**

The Church's witness to reconciliation builds upon the biblical story of God's activity in the world, God's work in Jesus and the journeys of his followers who are "ambassadors" of reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> Christian history is a grand narrative of these stories across time and place, and a humble and truthful review of these accounts reveals three necessary components to the work of reconciliation.

The first component is truth telling. The Christian story of reconciliation includes disastrous sins that have produced tragic distortions of God's purposes, and reconciliation begins by telling this truth. The work of reconciliation requires that Christians acknowledge acts of betrayal to the Gospel that include racism, sexism, slavery, genocide, colonialism and environmental degradation. The Church must confess its complicity in promoting alienation and repent through a fresh commitment to the work of reconciliation.

And yet, hope shapes and sustains the work of reconciliation, and hope is the second necessary component. Christian history includes tales of victory over alienation, and the Gospel has transformed countless individuals and communities and it has fueled communal efforts to abolish slavery, deliver the oppressed and foster racial reconciliation. Independence movements in many African and Latin American nations, the abolitionist movement in Great Britain and the United States, the Civil Rights struggle in the US, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa are examples. This truthful and balanced story of reconciliation offers hope, because in spite of challenges and failures, the Gospel of reconciliation is powerfully transformative for individuals and communities.

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<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

This past connects to the present and future in our journey towards reconciliation and this shared journey is the third component of the work of reconciliation. Scripture and Christian history confirm that reconciliation is a goal of our faith, and yet it is always a work in progress. Reconciliation is a journey toward a preferred future, yet it is always incomplete, and its final destination is still to come. Educating God's people and the world about God's purposes is a necessary part of this journey, and Messiah University is called to this educational task.

### **Embracing our Call to Reconciliation**

As an extension of its Christ-centered mission, Messiah University strives to be an academic community that faithfully responds to the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a commitment to which Messiah University has already laid claim. It is not a new mission, even as the nature of this work must adapt to address both new divisions as well as existing divides seen through fresh eyes. Toward this end, our collective efforts to embrace our calling as reconcilers must be holistic and comprehensive, originating in our loving response to God's unconditional love for us and embodied in our efforts to love our neighbor.

We can heed the words of Messiah University alumnus Dr. Ernest L. Boyer Sr. who described the efforts of reconciliation as working "to make the world better for everyone." We need to clarify and understand the brokenness of our community and our world, and we must continue imagining how to bring healing to that brokenness. Therefore, reconciliation efforts should be shaped by honest and hopeful engagement with the people and entities from which we have experienced division or isolation. At Messiah, faithfully embracing our call to reconciliation attends both to the ethos of our university community and the fulfillment of our educational purpose.

Attending to the character of our university is foundational to fulfilling our calling to reconciliation. Thus, we endeavor to engage with each other across the university in order to repair our communal brokenness. Recognizing that we are journeying together toward new ways of being and doing, professional and spiritual growth opportunities guide us toward both deeper understanding and restorative action. Through both personal and communal growth, we endeavor to provide an environment that beckons all members of our community to participate in our shared vocation in reconciling individuals with God, with each other, and with all of creation.

The ministry of reconciliation requires distinctive leadership skills and a commitment to the service of others for the sake of Christ. This means listening with compassion to those who have experienced brokenness because of inequities and lamenting the ways our community falls short of God's perfect vision. This also entails boldly speaking up for restorative justice for the benefit of the common good and encouraging others as they demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation. Ultimately, all members of the university must model long-term participation in the journey of reconciliation.

As an academic community, we endeavor to provide an education that beckons students to join the journey of reconciliation. Simply put, Messiah University students must discern their Christian calling to be reconcilers. Toward this end, students will comprehend the Biblical rootedness of reconciliation, including recognizing that all of humanity is created in the image of God and cultivating an ethic that focuses on healing in the world. Moreover, it is our genuine hope that students learn to see the world through the lens of compassion and to refine their decisions and actions in and for a life-long pursuit of justice.

Educational programs cultivate the vocational vision graduates will need to embody a sustained commitment to God's ministry of reconciliation in the world. Thus, educational



programs across the university demonstrate our institutional commitment to reconciliation. Students are taught to grow through the tensions inherent in learning and serving with others whose life experiences differ from their own. Students participate in transformative educational experiences both on and off campus that model sustained commitment to renewal and long-term collaboration with community partners. Students are mentored with care and intention as they practice reconciliation while engaging local and global communities.

As we lift up the convictions and commitments that undergird the work of reconciliation in our educational community, we confess there is much work to be done. We recognize that a community committed to reconciliation is by its very nature a community of accountability, one that holds the university as well as its members accountable to sustained movement forward. We realize we are on a journey of reconciliation, living in the now with a vision for the “not yet”. It is precisely because of our biblical commitment, shared Christian faith and bold educational vision that we as Messiah University steadfastly renew our commitment to the ministry of reconciliation.

**JOURNEYING TOWARD RECONCILIATION TOGETHER**  
**STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE**  
**2022-23**  
**(THEMES & GOALS)**

**THEME ONE — Foundational Outcomes**

The purpose of foundational outcomes is to systematize a sustainable, mission-driven infrastructure committed to diversity and inclusive excellence.

**Goal: Develop and implement appropriate structures including procedures, processes, policies, resources, and assessment that intentionally drive decision making around diversity and inclusive excellence.**

**THEME TWO — Compositional Outcomes**

The purpose of compositional outcomes is to recruit, retain, and develop a community of students, faculty, staff and administrators who help facilitate the University's commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence.

**Goal: Implement and assess recruitment and retention strategies to increase rates of domestic and international diversity of both undergraduate and graduate students.**

**Goal: Implement and assess strategies to effectively recruit, hire, and retain employees from historically underrepresented populations at all levels of the university**

**THEME THREE — Campus Climate Outcomes**

The purpose of campus climate outcomes is to nurture the capacity of members of the University community to create and sustain a campus environment that is healthy and welcoming for all.

**Goal: Promote a campus climate marked by a commitment to diversity, inclusive excellence, and reconciliation in which all members of the University feel a sense of belonging.**

**THEME FOUR — Educational Outcomes**

The purpose of educational outcomes is to advance the development of an innovative and sustainable educational program that enables and equips educators, co-curricular educators, staff and students to critically and compassionately understand diversity and inclusive excellence.

**Goal: The University will develop educational programs, as well as provide support for teaching, scholarship, and institutional service in ways that promote diversity, inclusive excellence, and cultural intelligence.**

## Appendix A

### Messiah University Foundations and the Idea of Inclusive Excellence

Messiah University's commitment to diversity and inclusion draws inspiration from its mission “to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.” Over the past several years, we have made serious efforts to engage the notion of *inclusive excellence* which rests on the belief that the long-unquestioned tradition of pursuing academic excellence in institutions of higher education needs to practice inclusiveness, lest its fruits benefit the privileged few. Consequently, we have tried to leverage diversity as a key ingredient in various aspects of the college's functioning.<sup>1</sup> Yet, much more needs to be done if we are to graduate from being an institution with pockets of inclusive excellence to one where it is hardwired throughout the institution.<sup>2</sup> Moving forward, new frameworks that ensure this systematic build up for inclusive excellence need to be considered.<sup>3</sup> Moving in this direction with all our available resources promises to be the thrust of this installment of the diversity strategic plan.

... [the University's efforts to pursue diversity and inclusion] should be further developed so as to indicate how a diverse Messiah University would change all aspects of community life and learning, as well as the business model of the University, and indicate how the changes engendered by a diverse campus community find their foundation in the university's mission.

—*Final Report of the Evaluation Team for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education* (March 2013), p. 10.

In the end, coming to terms with our Christian commitment to diversity and inclusion rests on this realization: *It is only in a pluralized world that we can collectively imagine a just one.* This calls for growing mindfulness, on our part as an institution, about those who have limited or no access to our “vineyard” or educational community.<sup>4</sup> Can we as an institution imagine ourselves as not just bringing educators, employees, and students who can succeed but also return back to the crossroads and bringing in those who have limited or no access to the institution? Such a concern for access which serves the cause of equity and justice would be factored into our financial modeling, institutional planning, and allocation of resources. It is only through this exercise that we live fully into the plurality of Christ's kingdom in a manner that establishes *both* intercultural understanding *and* reconciliation. Such work does not come without a cost that might be institutional, professional, and personal. Time, energy and treasure are not the only resources that are expended in such an effort. Rather, the cost might be also measured in terms of a more considered and measured pursuit of one's vocation that is sacrificial in order to be inclusive—a cost that is at once, social, cultural, and theological as well. This inner emptying we are being constantly called to pursue is what allows us to give room so that God and our diverse neighbors can enter our lives. And we cannot afford to be dismayed by the cost it takes us to be reconciled to God and our neighbors. We have to abandon our respective locations in Egypt, come together, cross our Red Seas and then journey towards this new Promised Land.<sup>5</sup> This must become our

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<sup>1</sup>Diversity is a broad and evolving concept defined as the presence and participation of people who differ. Diversity includes interrelated dimensions of human identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, biological sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, nationality, citizenship, religious affiliation, and mental and physical abilities. Diversity encompasses complex differences and similarities in perspectives, identities, and points of view among members of an institution as well as among individuals who make up the wider community.

<sup>2</sup> See William T. Lewis, “Inclusion: Diversity Reconsidered From Islands of Excellence to Integrated Inclusive Excellence” (Unpublished paper, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See S. Sturm, T. Eatman, T., J. Saltmarsh, & A. Bush, *Full participation: Building the architecture for diversity and public engagement in higher education* (White paper; Columbia University Law School: Center for Institutional and Social Change, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew 20:1–16 for the parable of the vineyard owner.

<sup>5</sup> Alma Clayton Pederson first mentioned the idea of “common destiny” when she visited Messiah University in April 2012. Since then this notion has continued to resonate and evolve at Messiah.

shared vision of common destiny. We seek nothing short of the creation of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the “beloved community” where we are fully reconciled and integrated with God and with each other, in the midst of our differences.

The imperative to pursue diversity and inclusive excellence, which is essential to fulfilling our educational mission, rests on two broad and interdependent foundations—our commitments to Christian faithfulness and academic excellence.

### **Christian Faithfulness**

At Messiah University, the impetus for the pursuit of diversity comes from our understanding of (1) God’s work in creation, (2) God’s vision of community, and (3) the ministry of reconciliation as articulated in Scripture. The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament illustrate the stories of persons and communities reconciled with God as well as with each other.

**God’s Work in Creation.** The theological notion of the *imago dei* grounds our commitment to diversity. In Genesis One, God “created humanity in God’s own image” and declares this creation to be “very good.” Our shared belief that every individual has value because “each person is created in the image of God,” serves to remind us about each individual’s worth that is matched by the diversity that defines our shared humanity.<sup>6</sup> However, culture, power, and history have intervened to silence and marginalize countless fellow humans leaving our world broken and unreconciled. Our faithful engagement of diversity compels us to create a world that is equitable and inclusive of all creation irrespective of differences in physical traits, ethnicity, culture, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political ideology, age, ability/disability, and socioeconomic class.

**God’s Vision for Community.** We understand the church to be the “body of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> We realize the body has many different parts which are all essential to the whole. As the body of Christ, we “voluntarily share our lives with each other, we care for each other, we rejoice and suffer together, we worship together, and we offer counsel to each other . . .”<sup>8</sup> As a Christian community, we are called to be compassionate toward—to suffer with—those who have been disadvantaged by prejudice and systemic oppression. We are called to counsel each other toward wholeness in our attitudes and relationships, including correcting the distorted views of others and ourselves that we have inherited from an unjust society.

The “ultimate goal of every Christian community should be to help us live more faithfully as disciples of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus Christ is our model for addressing inequity in the Church and in the world. In Christ, God has taken the initiative to dismantle the barriers that humans have used to separate. Speaking to the divisions between the Greeks and Jewish people that plagued the early church, the Letter to the Ephesians (2:14) affirms that Jesus Christ “has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” In Colossians 3:10–11, the Gospel message declares that “we are renewed in knowledge” according to the image of our creator and that such renewal is realized in the conviction that “there is no longer Greek and Jew . . . but Christ is all, and in all.” As a Christian community, we are called to dismantle walls of prejudice and oppression and be agents of healing in our broken world.

**Practicing God’s Ministry of Reconciliation.** Central to the Gospel is reconciling individuals with God and each other.<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation implies an “ethic of repairing the world”; this ethic of repair involves

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<sup>6</sup>Messiah University. “Foundational Values,” *University Catalog*. (Grantham, PA: Messiah University, 2010): 6–7. See also Anne Carr. “The New Vision of Feminist Theology: Method.” In *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993): 5–30.

<sup>7</sup>Douglas Jacobsen and Rodney Sawatsky. *Gracious Christianity: Living the Love We Profess* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). 8

Messiah University. “Foundational Values,” *University Catalog*. (Grantham, PA: Messiah University, 2010): 6–7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Messiah University. “Foundational Values,” *University Catalog*. (Grantham, PA: Messiah University, 2010): 6–7.



the intentional and demanding work of dismantling systems and practices that dehumanize and “perpetuate suffering and brokenness in relationships” together with the reconstruction of new structures and practices that are “informed by a radical submission to God’s call for love, justice, and righteousness.”<sup>11</sup>

The Prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly call us to labor on behalf of justice. We are to let “justice roll on like a river” (Amos 5:24). The Lord requires us “to act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). These prophetic Scriptures beckon us to engage fully in the struggle for justice, which includes the hard work of correcting individual attitudes as well as dismantling social structures that perpetuate misunderstanding and oppression. Restoring justice involves actively building bridges of and pathways to understanding and wholeness.

According to 2 Corinthians 5: 17–19, God calls us to be the ministers of reconciliation in both the personal and social realms: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” We are called to be vessels of reconciliation with the full understanding that our calling requires personal sacrifice. Confident of our calling, however, we seek to build bridges of understanding across chasms of prejudice and oppression. Where injustice has distorted perspectives and relationships, caused suffering and pain, we endeavor to bring healing in ways that restore the dignity of each person and renew the *shalom* of our community.<sup>12</sup>

Practicing God’s ministry of reconciliation is inextricably linked with God’s call to justice. God has called us to “share the redeeming Gospel of Jesus with those around us, to build bridges of understanding and peace across dividing lines” and “to work for justice, wherever injustice pervades.”<sup>13</sup> As John W. De Gruchy asserts, reconciliation finds its fullest expression in the “restoration of justice, whether that has to do with our justification by God, the renewal of interpersonal relations, or the transformation of society.”<sup>14</sup> As N.T. Wright affirms, “those who follow Jesus are committed, as he taught us to pray, to God’s will being done ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’ And that means that God’s passion for justice must become ours, too.”<sup>15</sup> The close connections between spiritual formation and inclusive excellence have never appeared so mutually intertwined.

Ultimately, our mission and identity at Messiah University help us to realize that diversity is not an end in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to intellectual, social, and spiritual renewal for individuals, communities, and society. The Christian community is called to practice the ministry of reconciliation by breaking down walls that separate and healing the brokenness of creation; the hope of this ministry is that the Christian community will come together as a new creation and, in doing so, offer a radical model for the world. As we consider the foundations of Christian spiritual formation and inclusive excellence in relationship to what is required to fulfill our calling as a distinct Christian academic community, may we remain ever mindful of these ultimate aims and our hope for the future.

—Eldon Fry, Former Campus Pastor, Messiah University,

*Inclusive Excellence and Spiritual Formation*, unpublished paper, pp. 1–2.

### **Making Academic Excellence Inclusive**

As an institution of higher learning, Messiah University takes seriously its commitment to academic excellence. An academically excellent institution intentionally acts to fulfill its mission, including

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<sup>11</sup>Lawrence Burnley, Eldon Fry, Douglas Jacobsen, Kim Phipps, and David Weaver-Zercher. “Educational Commitment to Reconciliation,” (Grantham, PA: Messiah University, 2009): 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>13</sup>Messiah University. “Foundational Values,” *University Catalog*. (Grantham, PA: Messiah University, 2010): 6–7.

<sup>14</sup> John W. De Gruchy. *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002): 2.

<sup>15</sup>N.T. Wright. *Simply Christian, Why Christianity Makes Sense*. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSan Francisco, 2006).

advancing mission in light of social, historical, and cultural contexts. Essentially, academic excellence demands that we know who we are and comprehend our distinctive contribution to the world. Excellence further suggests that we focus resources and energies around this specific mission. Teaching students to be “servants, leaders, and reconcilers” in our world today is central to our mission and dictates our vision for academic excellence.

Academic excellence also necessitates inclusiveness. An educational institution cannot truly be excellent if it does not draw upon the full range of humanity, giving underserved students and employees access to its educational programs and employment opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, how colleges address diversity is a matter of educational significance.<sup>17</sup> The notion of inclusive excellence speaks to the reality that diversity is central to educational mission. Inclusive excellence then becomes an “active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity” in interpersonal relationships, in the curriculum, in the cocurriculum, and in the communities with which individuals may connect.”<sup>18</sup> Inclusive excellence describes an institutional environment that “links diversity and excellence by intentionally engaging diversity for the educational benefit of all students”<sup>19</sup>.

***Education for Holistic Development.*** Inclusive excellence involves offering an educational program that meaningfully engages diversity as an intellectual and interpersonal phenomenon. We must engage diversity in ways that increase “awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions”.<sup>20</sup> This means preparing students to fully engage the world in which they will live. In this world, individuals will interact with a wide array of local and global communities and experience abundant connections to diverse intellectual, social, cultural, economic, and geographical contexts. We must, then, prepare graduates who can successfully navigate this global diversity, including critical engagement of its inequities in order to become agents of reconciliation in our world.

Another aspect of holistic development is intercultural competency, which is achieved by first comprehending the influence of one’s own social context and nurturing a sense of humility. This self-understanding provides a foundation from which to understand the culture of others as well as gain appreciation for the role of the social context in shaping the other’s identity and experience. As such, intercultural competency serves the common good. Toward this end, Martha Nussbaum argues that education must not only “promote the human development of students” but also must “promote in students an understanding of the goals of human development for all.”<sup>21</sup> Students must not only mature intellectually, socially, and spiritually but also must be nurtured in the conviction that all human beings have the capacity for growth and contribution to the world.

As an extension of this commitment to holistic development, inclusive excellence is “attentive to the cultural differences learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise.”<sup>22</sup>

***Diversity is an asset in the educational community that can and must be engaged in the learning process.*** Individual differences (e.g. learning styles and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. gender, cultural/ethnic, national, religious affiliation; socioeconomic class, ability status, and

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<sup>16</sup> The term “underserved” students includes the following: historically-underrepresented minority, first generation, transfer and low-income students. See Jayne E. Brownell & Lynn E. Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality* (Washington D.C.: AAC&U, 2010), pp. 2–3.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell J. Chang, “Preservation or Transformation: Where’s the Real Educational Discourse on Diversity?” *The Review of Higher Education* 25:2. (Winter 2002): 125–140.

<sup>18</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities, “Making Excellence Inclusive,” [www.aacu.org/inclusive\\_excellence/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/index.cfm).

<sup>19</sup> Carmen Coustaut, “A Vision for Diversity: A Vision for Excellence.” *All Things Academic* 8:2. (September 2007):4.

<sup>20</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities, “Making Excellence Inclusive,” [www.aacu.org/inclusive\\_excellence/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/index.cfm).

<sup>21</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Education for Profit, Education for Freedom.” *Liberal Education*. (Summer 2009): 8.

<sup>22</sup> Jeff Milem, Mitchell J. Chang, and Anthony L. Antonio. *Making Diversity Work on Campus: A Research-Based Perspective*. (Washington D.C.: American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2005): vi.

country of origin) are part of our identities. We do not discard our group affiliations or the social contexts that have shaped us when we enter the learning environment. If education is to draw out the fullness of human potential, the full range of each person's distinctiveness must be engaged. Inclusive excellence is attentive to individual differences, but extends beyond the individual to the community itself. Inclusive excellence as an educational construct emphasizes that *all* students benefit from engaging diversity—promising the development of wholesome human relationships and deepening intellectual engagement. Engaging diversity equips graduates to be agents of renewal in our society and, in doing so, advances our institutional mission.

***A Community of Hospitality.*** Inclusive excellence fully engages and transforms the community and its members. Inclusive excellence pursues a “welcoming community” that engages diversity on behalf of each student’s education as well as organizational learning. Within and beyond the educational program, the ethos and environment of the institution itself must reflect hospitality to diversity.

Hospitality means being attentive to demographics of the community. The composition of the college community impacts its ability to deliver an excellent education. The relationship between demographic composition and learning outcomes is significant; there is a clear correlation between the educational potential of an institution and the diverse composition of its student body, faculty, administrators, and staff. Students are more likely to engage with individuals from different backgrounds in proportion to the compositional diversity of the college campus.<sup>23</sup> When we have student and educator demographics that reflect the diverse world with which God has entrusted us, the learning community is strengthened. Indeed, demographics matter. Compositional diversity matters not only to personal relationships but also to intellectual engagement.

The composition of a community in terms of diversity impacts the achievement of learning outcomes for *all* members of the campus community. Increasing compositional diversity leads to a “broader collection of thoughts, ideas, and opinions held by the student body” and this, in turn, increases the likelihood that each and every student will engage a “wider range of perspectives on a particular issue.”<sup>24</sup> We all have something to lose when diversity is not present; we all have something important to gain when diversity is present and fully engaged in the learning process. Students learn better in the presence of diversity, among their peers, in the faculty, and in academic content; diversity equips students to engage a variety of perspectives.

***Education for Transformation.*** Our educational mission demands that we equip students with the requisite abilities and attitudes to fulfill their responsibilities as servants, leaders, and reconcilers in a diverse world. Fulfilling this vision depends upon educators who not only comprehend the individual and community implications of diversity but who are also well equipped to prepare and deliver academic content that helps students discern and act. Students must learn to see the world as it is, with all of its flaws, and to understand the conditions that have led to inequity. At the same time, an education for transformation teaches students to see the world for what it can become and to respond as people of hope. Ultimately, students must be taught to see their own gifts and potential to be change-agents that help bend the “arc of the moral universe towards justice.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Engaging Diversity: Our Christian and Educational Calling**

Diversity is both a theological and educational mandate. Fulfilling our educational mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires us to engage diversity in a manner that fully prepares students for “service, leadership,

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<sup>23</sup> Mitchell J. Chang. “Does Racial Diversity Matter? “The educational impact of a racially diverse undergraduate population.” *Journal of College Student Development* 40(4). (1999): 377–95.

<sup>24</sup> Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963). The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. [http://mlk-](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated_letter_from_birmingham/)

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and reconciliation” in church and society. Our commitments to Christian faithfulness and academic excellence provide inspiration for the challenging work of reconciliation and justice. Taken together, our theological and academic commitments compel us to better understand diversity itself and to equip students to recognize injustice and be agents of transformation.

While essential to fulfilling our mission, diversity must also be understood within our institutional context. Inclusive excellence and reconciliation are extensions of our mission but are also properly understood in light of our mission and identity. As a particular Christian academic community, Messiah does not equally affirm all beliefs or behaviors. All educators and administrators are expected to affirm the Apostle’s Creed and to abide by the Community Covenant. To affirm inclusive excellence at Messiah University does not mean acceptance of all differences. While our educational objectives call for “gaining an appreciation for cultural and ethnic diversity”<sup>26</sup> and acting in ways that “respect gender, cultural, and ethnic diversity,”<sup>27</sup> they also call for the evaluation of cultural values and ethical traditions in light of the biblical witness. Similarly, while we encourage understanding of and engagement with diverse religious perspectives, all employees are expected to affirm basic Christian convictions. To be faithful to our mission, diverse perspectives and traditions must be understood in the context of Messiah University’s distinct identity and mission.

Ultimately, our mission and identity help us to realize that diversity is not an end in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to intellectual, social, and spiritual renewal for individuals, communities, and society. Diversity is a crucial aspect of our educational commitment to holistic development and personal transformation. Diversity is also necessary to shaping a powerful learning environment that enlarges student capacity for critical thinking and cognitive complexity. Simultaneously, diversity is part of our response to the gospel; it is a means to becoming a reconciled community. Diversity is part of what it means to celebrate the goodness of God’s creation and to renew our understanding of the reality that all of humanity reflects the signature of God. Engaging diversity is an avenue to realizing God’s vision for the body of Christ in our world. In this, we are called to practice the ministry of reconciliation, together bringing hope and healing, offering a radical model for the world to celebrate and *embrace*.

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<sup>26</sup>Messiah University. “University-Wide Educational Objectives,” *University Catalog*. (Grantham, PA. Messiah University 2010).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.