



# Educational Commitment to Reconciliation

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## Messiah College - Educational Commitment to Reconciliation

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### Introduction:

Reconciliation has been a commitment of Messiah College from its early days, even before the word “reconciliation” came into frequent use. At the time of Messiah's founding, the term “peaceableness” would have been the preferred terminology, and the Brethren in Christ would have focused their peaceable intentions on both interpersonal relations and non-participation in war. Peaceableness was generally understood in a relatively passive way: as the absence of obvious strife. But during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it slowly acquired a more active connotation, and the term “peacemaking” began to be used. It is likely that C.N. Hostetter, Jr., Messiah's fourth president, had something like peaceableness, peacemaking and reconciliation in mind when he was asked about the core educational goals of the College, and he suggested a focus on “right relationships.” A better two-word definition of reconciliation would be difficult to find, and reconciliation as a synonym for healthy relationships has always been part of Messiah's educational philosophy.

Given this heritage, it is not surprising to find that the College's “institutional identity committee,” (which was convened in the mid 1990's) formally incorporated the language of reconciliation into the College's contemporary documents. The word reconciliation thus appears both in the College's mission statement and in its statement of foundational values. The mission statement reads:

*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.*

The fifth of the College's five foundational values links reconciliation with the ethic of service and the pursuit of justice:

*Central to the Gospel is the work of **reconciling** individuals with God, with each other, and with all of creation. God has called us to be active agents in this work as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Prepared in this way, we are compelled to share the redeeming Gospel of Jesus with those around us, to build bridges of understanding and peace across the dividing lines of race, class, age, gender, religion and ethnicity, to demonstrate the love of God in service to others, to open our hearts to the poor and needy, and to work for justice wherever injustice prevails.*

When Messiah College proclaims that reconciliation is a key element of its institutional identity and a central goal of its educational mission, it is making a distinctive claim, so it seems appropriate to reflect on what that claim might entail. This document suggests four components for consideration: (1) the Biblical rootedness of reconciliation; (2) an ethic that focuses on repairing the world; (3) a spirituality of reconciliation; and (4) a pedagogy of community engagement.

1. *The Biblical foundation of reconciliation:* Biblically, reconciliation is based on God's initiative to reconcile humankind to God through Christ. Reconciliation is necessary when there is such deadly division from our Creator. Romans 5:10, 11 makes it clear that the first steps of reconciliation were birthed in the heart of God. Then, II Corinthians 5:18, 19 informs us that God initiated the ministry of reconciliation and we are invited to share in that work. As believers we bear the responsibility to be reconcilers. The incarnation of Christ resulting in death and resurrection gives hope to all people that God is seeking to reconcile us through the transforming activity of the Spirit.

But, we are challenged to continually work at this ministry. While our attempts may prove imperfect, we

are given opportunity to engage the ministry of reconciliation in our humanity as an expression of the grace we have received from God. In the process of reconciliation, a new community is formed. One that is not exclusive but embracing. The community that is formed is one that nurtures reconciliation towards healing and wholeness with all of creation, both social and natural.

Sometimes the ministry of reconciliation will be costly. The price of reconciliation requires that retribution be laid aside and that we seek to live out renewed relationships of understanding and unity. It requires us to acknowledge our own frequent contributions to oppression and broken relationships. One of the theological traditions of Messiah College refers to “costly discipleship.” As believers we are reconciled to be one in Christ. However, reconciliation is not uniformity. In fact, the very need for reconciliation is highlighted by our differences and our divisions. Reconciliation is the process of reaching across human divides and embracing the positive outcomes which come from valuing those differences. If we are unable to value the rich texture of our communal life together, our future possibilities remain limited and less than promising. We know that we have not achieved the absence of such divisions but we are entrusted with a great gift of many opportunities to pursue reconciliation.

2. *An ethic of repairing the world:* The notion of reconciliation implies an ethic of putting things back together, of repairing what has been torn apart or unraveled. Reconciliation never begins from scratch or with a blank slate, and similarly ethical action will not result in the creation of a perfect world order. Because we are all part of the problem as well as the solution, perfection is beyond our finite reach. But, before the Fall, humankind was one with the Creator, and now through Jesus the Christ, God has sought to restore/repair that relationship by reconciling us to Himself. By God’s grace we are invited to participate in restoring the kind of horizontal relationships we enjoyed with one another and with all of creation prior to the Fall. The humble awareness of our own imperfections and limitations should undercut any sense of personal triumphalism. A reconciliatory Christian perspective articulates that only God can fully restore the rightful ordering of the universe and humanity’s relationship with God. Only God can “heal” the brokenness of the world.

As we participate in the ministry of reconciliation, we should anticipate a negative reaction from the world and even from some fellow Christians who fail to see the importance of destroying systemic injustice. The activity of “repairing” involves the active and intentional work aimed at the identification, deconstruction, and dismantling of existent destructive and dehumanizing structures, systems, policies, and practices (and our own perpetuation of them) that function to perpetuate suffering and brokenness in relationships. The existence of such destructive forces creates and sustains the need for the activity of “repairing” – the ministry of reconciliation. As such, the activity of “repairing” often comes at a price (John 15:18-20), but also with a promise of eternal reward (John 12:20-26). The activity of “repairing” also involves the process of reconstruction – the creation of a new and improved reality – sustainable constructive and humanizing structures, systems, policies, and practices- that are informed by a radical submission to God’s call for love, justice, and righteousness.

3. *Spirituality of reconciliation:* As recipients of the precious gift of reconciliation, we acknowledge our calling to share this gift in ministry to others. We also realize that this is a costly ministry as we view the brokenness of creation, society and the Church. Truly understanding the “*imago dei*” compels us to be global in our educational efforts and hospitable in all of our relationships. Our collective efforts to educate for reconciliation must be holistic and comprehensive, originating in our loving response to God’s unconditional love for us. When we engage others, we must always understand that we are relating to people God cherishes and values. The spirituality of reconciliation demands a long term commitment and should involve the entire educational community.

Reconciliation efforts must be shared in humility and they must willingly embrace the need for mutual learning. This epistemology of humility and mutuality resonates with the Anabaptist, Pietistic and Wesleyan roots of Messiah College. Such spirituality will be sustained by the challenging work of biblical

study, prayer, theological and social analysis, institutional discernments and costly obedience. Therefore reconciliation efforts should be shaped by honest and hopeful engagement with those people and entities from which we have experienced division or isolation.

Reconciliation is challenging because it is not a quick fix, but rather, it is a long term commitment to discipleship. It requires a faith journey reflected in the rhythms of preparing soil, planting, tending the crops and gathering harvest as a continuing cycle. It is shaped and sustained with a desire to celebrate the “shalom” from God which has not yet been fully realized.

Our vision of reconciliation is not one of homogeneity or uniformity. Rather, it compels us to embrace our diversity so that we can offer genuine hospitality and service to each other and to those outside our campus community. As we learn and grow together, we are provided with opportunities to share in educating, mentoring and encouraging one another along this challenging path of reconciliation. Results from campus assessment data reveal that we struggle to accurately understand and embrace one another’s differences. But, the fact that such probing questions are being asked and our community is attempting to address the issues raised by the responses, is evidence of our commitment to reconciliation. Together we are called by faith to be an educational community that responds to the call of the ministry of reconciliation and celebrates the signs of hope no matter how small or how global in scope. Therefore, we affirm that our attempts to educate toward repairing the brokenness of the church and society are motivated by our understanding of God’s love and active power which should result in faithful acts of service and “peaceableness.”

4. *Pedagogy of Community Engagement:* The ministry of reconciliation requires a particular set of leadership skills and a commitment to the service of others for the sake of Christ. Educators and mentors need to be people who can repair brokenness and pass on those key understandings to others as they model a commitment to reconciliation through lifestyle and active service. This type of pedagogy cannot be parochial in scope but through hospitality must be open to connecting to “the other” and allowing “the other” to share her understanding in a way that has the potential to transform the Messiah College community. To be effective, this pedagogical process requires that educators be cognizant of their own brokenness, making possible their transformation while instructing others. At the same time, true hospitality will maintain the essence of the College’s legacy by inviting those outside the community into educational dialogue. Some examples of the ways that Messiah College has demonstrated a commitment to the pedagogy of community engagement include the historic partnership with Daystar University in Kenya, the development of the Philadelphia campus and collaborative relationship with Temple University, the establishment of the Harrisburg Institute and a myriad of other initiatives including curricular requirements such as the general education pluralism course requirement, the implementation of the Created and Called for Community course, and the initiation of the RECRIP course which involved partnerships with two South African universities. (See Appendix A)

### **Conclusion:**

Messiah College’s foundational documents proclaim that our community exists to serve the world and the Church. Sharing the gift of academic scholarship with the world and the Church from a Christian context can provide a vital connectedness between a discipline, the cultural context, the person and vocation. One hundred years ago a group of leaders sensed a calling to serve the Church and the world by establishing Messiah College. Their vision propels us onward in our efforts to be a reconciling community. Integrative programs across the campus and beyond our physical borders continue to model our institution’s commitment to reconciliation as we provide educational opportunities for students to pursue reconciliation as they fulfill their chosen vocations.

Yet, there is still much work to be done. We need to clarify and understand the brokenness of our world and we must continue imagining how to bring healing to that brokenness. This challenge rings true as we heed the words of Messiah College alumnus Dr. Ernest L. Boyer Sr. who described the efforts of reconciliation as working “to make the world better for everyone.” This theme is exemplified in our ongoing campus effort to be

identified as “gracious Christians” who display “an embracing evangelical spirit” as we nurture a campus ethos characterized by hospitality. As the College enters its second Centennial, it is because of our shared faith and bold vision that we seek to fulfill our enduring promise by steadfastly renewing our commitment to the ministry of reconciliation.

Some selected examples of how Messiah educates students toward reconciliation:

#### CORE Course

*Reconciliation is a central theme across the first year course, Created and Called for Community. The course coheres around Jesus' commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and "love your neighbor as yourself." These ideas are explicated through three major themes of the course: Creation, Community, and Vocation. "Creation" considers how all of humanity was created in the image of God. "Community" explores the variety of contexts in which reconciliation is enacted, including family, church, nation, and world. Finally, "Vocation" explores how reconciliation is part of what it means to pursue our calling as Christians.*

*- Dr. Cynthia A. Wells  
Fellow in The Ernest L. Boyer Center  
Director of the Created and Called for Community course*

#### The Ernest L. Boyer Center

*Reconciliation is central to the mission of Messiah College and Ernest L. Boyer Sr. – Commissioner of Education under President Jimmy Carter, chancellor of the SUNY System, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and a Messiah College alum – made reconciliation central to his life and work. Accordingly, the Ernest L. Boyer Center at Messiah College seeks to enhance the common good by bringing Boyer's vision for reconciliation in the academy and in the larger society into meaningful dialogue with pressing social and educational issues that face the nation today.*

*– Dr. Richard Hughes  
Senior Boyer Fellow  
Distinguished Professor of American Religious History*

#### General Education Required Courses

*All Messiah students are required to take one General Education capstone course from a broad selection of courses in three categories: Ethics in the Modern World, World Views, and Pluralism in Contemporary Society. These courses are designed to complete the General Education program and help students prepare to engage the world in which they will live and work. Building on study based in the specific academic disciplines in the earlier part of the General Education curriculum as well as in the student's major, these interdisciplinary courses focus attention on understanding the world ethically, intellectually, and socially. Thus, they fulfill a crucial role in ensuring that we accomplishing our College Mission to prepare students for lives service, leadership, and reconciliation.*

*– Dr. John Yeatts, '68  
Associate Dean for General Education & Common Learning*

#### Peace and Conflict Studies Program

*The Peace and Conflict Studies Program works toward horizontal reconciliation through teaching, mentoring, and living by example. We offer an academic minor in Peace and Conflict Studies. With classroom instruction, annual lectures, and personal contact with caring professionals both on and off campus, students learn to see the world through the lens of peace, compassion, and reconciliation. As a result, they become ministers of reconciliation, a sweet aroma of Christ everywhere they work, travel, study, and play.*

*– Dr. Sharon Baker  
Assistant Professor of Theology and Religion  
Coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program*

The Collaboratory for Strategic Partnerships and Applied Research

*The Messiah College Collaboratory involves 150+ students and dozens of educators and community partners who are learning to live the Gospel of Jesus. As Jesus began his ministry of reconciling all things to God (Colossians 1:20), he said to the people of his hometown: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19. The Good News about peace with God fundamentally and necessarily includes setting things right between people and within Creation.*

*Collaboratory participants are demonstrating God's love through creative applications of their academic disciplines. Whether creating jobs for AIDS orphans and survivors in Zambia, increasing math literacy among the visually impaired in Burkina Faso, developing village-scale water purification technologies in Honduras, or using wireless remote coaching to enable Pennsylvanians with Aspergers disorder to stay in school or keep a job, every Collaboratory project begins with and is sustained through long-term partnership and mutual dependency with a partner community. Learning to accomplish together what would be impossible on our own is both a process and sign of reconciliation.*

*Wherever we go God is already there. The work of the Collaboratory is to discover and join God's ministry of reconciliation, in hope that by life, word, sign or deed others might also come to know God and be reconciled to him. It is also to foster practiced excellence among Messiah College graduates in their fields of study, the vocational vision graduates will need to carry God's ministry of reconciliation into the world, and the courage they will need to act on convictions.*

– Dr. David Vader

*Director of The Collaboratory for Strategic Partnerships and Applied Research  
Professor of Engineering*

Reconciliation House

*The Reconciliation House accomplishes horizontal reconciliation by hosting a series entitled "Let Me Explain" where persons who represent groups or viewpoints often ignored, misunderstood or marginalized have the ability to describe their convictions, experiences, and values. Furthermore, the House hosts Slow Food which invites people from all backgrounds on campus to come together to cook a meal and have meaningful dialogue. We also host events for other campus groups that are working toward reconciliation. In order to work toward vertical reconciliation, the House plans to meet once a week regularly, to pray, do some theological reflection on reconciliation, observe cases where reconciliation has worked and where it has not and observe what reconciliation best looks like in our personal lives, on Messiah College's campus and in the world.*

– Benjamin Stolz '10

*Student Chaplain, College Ministries*

*The Reconciliation House is a living-learning residence housing selected students and a live-in educator that provides space for broad-based public dialogue and debate on diverse and difficult issues. The Reconciliation House allows space to explore and model the ministry of reconciliation as a biblical mandate for Christian living with explicit and direct implications for one's spiritual formation. This living-learning residence creates a public space that taps into existing synergies between intellect, faith, teaching, service, and reconciliation. Reconciliation House intentionally brings together students, faculty, and staff members of Messiah College as well as members of the larger community to explore the meanings of injustice, inequality, and reconciliation as it relates to persons in both personal and collective terms.*

– Rev. Eldon Fry  
*College Pastor*

Multicultural Council

*Through its programming, the Multicultural Council has demonstrated its commitment to reconciliation by ensuring that students at Messiah continually have the spaces to reconcile their understanding of self and a pursuit of seeing the interconnectedness we have as beings created by a God of love and justice. Throughout the year the council provides opportunities for students to engage in spoken word events, conferences such as the National Multicultural Student Leadership Conference, encourages participation in the Damascus Road Anti-Racism training, and implements Martin Luther King Jr. Student Celebration. The council's ability to create welcoming spaces stems from an understanding that the four points of vertical and horizontal reconciliation create a circle that offers deep and wide perspectives.*

– Heraldo-Kane Osorio, '07  
Former Associate Director of the Office Of Multicultural Programs

Residence Life

*The Office of Residence Life aspires to fulfill Messiah's vision of horizontal and vertical reconciliation primarily through providing, and entering into, safe spaces where relationships can grow, mend, and ultimately flourish. Resident Directors and Resident assistants are trained to assist students and serve as mediators, when necessary, as they grow through conflict and tensions inherent in learning to live with others different from themselves. In partnership with College Ministries, Koinonia groups formed in residences provide venues for students to participate in bible study, prayer, accountability, and worship.*

– Doug Wood  
Associate Dean of Students

Agapé Center for Service Learning

*Christian service is a distinctive and practical way of educating students toward reconciliation. As students serve alongside community partners in a variety of local, national, and international contexts, they are given the opportunity to reflect on their basic beliefs about themselves and others through extended service trips, weekly Outreach teams, and one time service plunge days. Through service-learning, students discover more about who they are and the complexities of engaging the World outside of their own. The Agapé Center provides opportunities for students to practice reconciliation as they serve communities around the world and refine their decisions and action in for a life long pursuit of justice.*

– Chad Frey, '96  
Director, Agape Center for Service and Learning