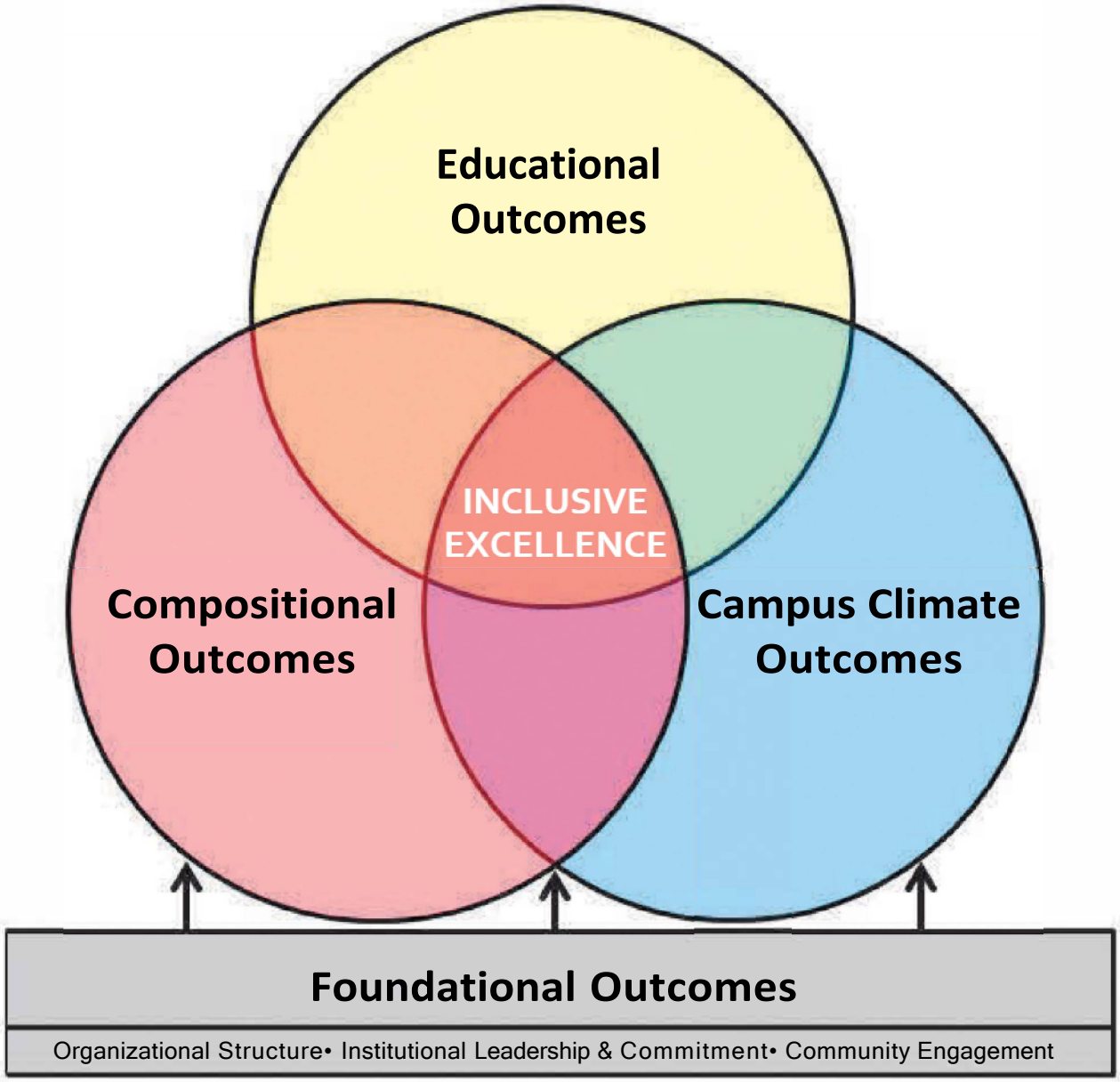
Better Together

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE
2026-2027

THEMES OF THE PLAN

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



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It is with great enthusiasm and a shared commitment to our university mission that I submit this year's annual Diversity Strategic Plan. Our theme, *Better Together*, is not just a slogan; it is a theological and practical blueprint for our collective future. To truly be *Better Together* at Messiah University means recognizing that our diversity is a divine reflection of the Kingdom of God. It means moving past mere coexistence and instead actively pursuing deep relationships marked by a spirit of reconciliation and a desire for authentic community. It means understanding that our differences in background, culture, and perspective are not obstacles to be managed, but gifts to be celebrated in our academic and communal life. Our commitment to diversity is not driven by a modern trend or bureaucratic requirement, but is rooted in our faith tradition and the biblical call for reconciliation and unity.

At Messiah University we often speak of our community in the beautiful imagery of the stained-glass window metaphor. As members of the campus community, we represent those individual pieces of glass that comprise the window. Our unique cultural backgrounds, histories, and gifts are the distinct colors. True unity does not mean melting all the glass down into a single, uniform color. Instead, our aim is that the Holy Spirit fit our distinct pieces together so that the light of Christ will shine through us so that the world will see a beautiful and cohesive image of the Kingdom of God.

I thank each of you for your thoughtful contributions to this particular plan and for the work you will do this coming academic year to help us live into the promises of this document. The plan presented here represents a critical roadmap for our journey towards reconciliation and a powerful statement of our commitment to fostering a truly diverse and inclusive campus environment.

To be *Better Together* we recognize that we cannot achieve our full potential apart from one another. We have been called and created for community; true growth, learning, and transformation happen when we lean into our differences while leaning on the One who created us and calls us into a recognition of our shared humanity. As we move forward in this academic year, let us recommit ourselves to this calling which lies at the heart of our mission as a university and as people of God.

In Christ,

Todd Allen
Vice President for Diversity Affairs

Reconciliation and Messiah University: Pursuing our Christ-Centered Calling

George Pickens, Emerson Powery, and Cynthia Wells[1]

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"[2]. 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.[3] Messiah's "embracing evangelical spirit" proclaims its intention to demonstrate the good

[1] 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.
[2] *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.
[3] 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. 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.[4] 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.[5]

In Genesis, God established a covenant with Abraham to make "a great nation" and to bless "all the families of the earth."[6] 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

[4] Messiah University. "Foundational Values", https://www.messiah.edu/info/20003/faith_and_values/7/foundational_values
[5] "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*.
[6] 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.[7]

The Prophets attempted to hold Israel accountable to God's covenant. Their charge associates fair treatment of the "immigrant" (CEB)[8] 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).[9]

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.[10] He also initiated activities among non-Jews. He healed one enslaved to a Gentile centurion.[11] He cast out a demon from a non-Jewish Gerasenean.[12] At the behest of a persistent Syro-Phoenician woman, he healed her daughter from afar.[13] These actions symbolize explicitly what it meant to love God and to love neighbor as the greatest human pursuits.

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[7] Ruth 4:13-17
[8] Other English Bibles translate the Hebrew word *gēr* as "alien" (NRSV), "foreigner" (NIV), or "sojourner" (ESV).
[9] Isaiah 61
[10] Mark 9:38-41
[11] Luke 7: 1-10. The Roman centurion was a generous benefactor of the local Jewish community.
[12] Mark 5: 1-20
[13] Mark 7: 24-30

Moreover, Gentile inclusion energized Paul's mission.[14] 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."[15] 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.[16] 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.

[14] Gal 3:8-9
[15] Galatians 3:28
[16] 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.[17] 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.

[17] 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.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE
ROLLING STRATEGIC PLANNING
2026-27
(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.**