

The 2016-2017 Ohio Conference year appears to me to be a year of flux. It has been a huge learning curve for me coming into the position with no Conference experience other than as an occasional delegate. Three of the five members of the Leadership Team were also first timers. Then, the passing of Naomi Engle was a huge loss to the Leadership Team as well as the whole Conference. Her voice will definitely be missed.

Our first item of business after the ACA in March was to hire Cliff Brubaker as half-time time regional pastor for Western Ohio.

We set up a group known as the Voice to deal with ongoing relationships with Mennonite agencies outside of Ohio Conference. Any congregations or individuals with concerns regarding the direction that these agencies appear to be taking can bring them to this group, and they will engage the respective agency in dialogue.

At the time of this writing, we have had two Year of Covenant meetings with a third one scheduled for early February. We have studied together what it means to live in a covenantal relationship. The meetings were fairly well attended, and the discussions were intense and fruitful. There seemed to be a desire to work together as one body.

Along with the Year of Covenant, we also designated this fiscal year as the Year of Mission. In place of the fall regional cluster meetings, we held three regional meetings led by the missional team of Jason Rissler, Shawn Hilliard and Jacob Dodson. They did a great job of introducing the pre-ACA missional event featuring the leadership of Alan and Debra Hirsch.

In October, we presented Cliff with another half-time opportunity. We asked him to head up the rest of the Year of Covenant as well as to interview each congregation individually regarding how they feel about their relationship with the Ohio Conference and what the Conference can do to increase the trust between congregations and conference. The results of those interviews have determined the makeup of our delegate sessions at this year's ACA.

Lastly, the loss of several congregations which have decided to leave the Ohio Conference has led to a financial crisis. We feel we have cut staff as far as we can. We are attempting to cut almost \$20,000 out of the budget by sending *Perspective* and *Ohio Mennonite Evangel* electronically to congregations for dispersal. We definitely sense a need to hire a conference minister to take some administrative duties off the shoulders of our regional pastors and staff and to provide leadership and direction for the Conference, but we have no funds without tapping some of the capacity building and endowment funds.

We covet your continued prayers and comments as we try to determine what is best for the continued support in building and maintaining healthy congregations which can effectively witness to the healing and hope that Christ has to offer to the world.

Bob Sauder, moderator