

you and Patrick were ordained for ministry?

Matt Hamsher worked with us through the ordination process. He met with us and the Millersburg elders and previewed with us what the steps of the process for ordination were. Part of the ordination process is going through a pastoral review. Matt helped to make the pastoral review a positive experience because of how it was set up. He

also met with the elders to go over congregational feedback from the pastoral review.

Matt also was present at our interviews with the Credentialing Ministry [the Ohio Conference group which can give pastors approval for licensing and ordination], which felt supportive. In addition, Matt preached at our ordination service. It was a really celebratory time.

Support through the years

Dan King is pastor of Beech Mennonite Church in Louisville. He shares the following thoughts about his experiences with regional pastors in the Ohio Conference.

I've had the privilege of working with three regional pastors in my two Ohio pastorates. Eldon King was always available with a listening ear and words of encouragement and wisdom when I served at Dover Christian Fellowship. Later it was Wayne Nitzsche who first contacted me about the pastoral opportunity at Beech and then laid the groundwork for a healthy pastor-congregation relationship that continues to the present. He also provided helpful support as we added a

youth pastor to our staff.

Now I am enjoying Andy Stoner's leadership, particularly during our monthly pastor-peer meetings at Camp Luz. I anticipate with eagerness each of these meetings as we gather for worship, prayer, and "shop-talk" discussions directed by Andy. I believe that the work of our regional pastors is crucial to the life and health of our congregations.



Dan King

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Regional pastors empower churches

When is a regional pastor from Ohio Conference likely to work with your congregation?

- A. When your congregation is seeking a new pastor.
- B. When your congregation is seeking solutions for dealing with conflict.
- C. When your pastor is meeting with other Ohio Conference pastors as part of a pastor-peer group.
- D. When your congregation is working to develop a vision for the future.
- E. When your pastor is going through the licensing or ordination process.
- F. All of the above.

The correct answer, of course, is "All of the above."

As the focus statement of the Ohio Conference notes, "The focus of Ohio Conference is to support, connect and lead in ways that equip and empower

our congregations to enlarge the faith community in obedience to Jesus Christ."

Day in and day out, Regional Pastors Andy Stoner and Matt Hamsher are working to make sure that the Ohio Conference focus statement is more than just a nice-sounding statement of intent. They truly are helping to equip and empower



Andy Stoner



Matt Hamsher

Supporting healthy, growing congregations

er congregations to enlarge the faith community in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Andy Stoner serves the Conference on a full-time basis, relating to 47 congregations. Matt Hamsher serves the Conference on a half-time basis, relating to 27 congregations. In addition, Conference Minister Tom

Kauffman serves as regional pastor for three congregations.

Ohio Conference's regional pastors are concerned with the health of Ohio Conference congregations. They promote healthy congregations in a variety of ways. For a more complete list of regional pastor tasks, see the article below.

RP job involves variety of tasks

The job of description for Ohio Conference's regional pastors includes a number of different tasks:

- ◆ Engage in regular pastor-peer meetings, providing updates on Conference initiatives and sharing in the events and needs of the group.
- ◆ Assist congregational search committees in finding pastoral leadership and work closely with the Credentialing Ministry for appropriate license and ordination of pastor candidates.
- ◆ Meet periodically with the pastor(s) of the local congregation to offer support and encouragement in ministry.
- ◆ Link pastors and congregations with resources for visioning, conflict resolution, and other denominational resources.
- ◆ Serve as a resource to the Ministry Development Team to communicate needs and issues of congregations as well as develop and work with Resource Teams.
- ◆ Meet with the key leaders of each congregation assigned for a half-day dialogue on the vision and direction of the local congregation, hearing the needs and priorities of the congregation as well as reflecting on how the Conference can be a resource to the congregation in fulfilling its vision for ministry in that context.
- ◆ Be meaningfully involved in cluster meetings [regional meetings of Ohio Conference delegates] and Annual Conference Assembly.

Support for pastors starting ministry

Christine Nafziger co-pastors Millersburg Mennonite Church with her husband, Patrick. She agreed to reflect on their experience with regional pastors in Ohio Conference.



Could you talk a bit about your experience with the regional pastor when you were a new pastor coming to the Ohio Conference?

Regional pastor Matt Hamsher preached at the ordination service for Patrick and Christine Nafziger, co-pastors of Millersburg Mennonite Church.

At the time, Mary Nitzsche was the regional pastor for Millersburg Mennonite Church. Our relationship with her from the start was one reason we ended up in Ohio. Mary sat in on our interviews with the pastoral search committee. Once we came to Millersburg, she set up a ministry support team for us made up of four people, including an elder and a search committee member. The team was helpful for us and met for about two and half years, usually monthly.

Since we were new pastors, Mary set us up with mentors, who also met with us monthly. She also had materials on working with first-time pastors which were helpful. She played a key role in helping us succeed. She set up essential support systems for us.

One of the regional pastors' tasks is fostering connections between pastors through pastor-peer meetings. What has your experience been with these meetings?

When we first started at Millersburg, we met with a pastor-peer group led by Mary and Wayne Nitzsche. Our group is now led by Andy Stoner and meets about once a month. We study different topics. The group has given us a chance to ask pastoral questions we have had as new pastors, including questions of protocol for different situations, such as funerals.

Another responsibility for regional pastors is going through the licensing and ordination process with pastors. Could you reflect on your recent experience as