



## Out & About

Aug. 7 — Leadership Team

Aug. 9 — Lafayette Christian Fellowship discussion

Aug. 16 — Preach at Jubilee Mennonite Church

Aug. 17 — All-Staff meeting in Kidron

Aug. 18 — Credentialing Ministry Team

Aug. 19 — Mid-States Conference Ministers and Moderators meeting

Aug. 23 — Jacob Dodson's ordination at Wooster Mennonite

Aug. 31 — Ministry Development Team



# The Grapevine

Travels and News

from Ohio Conference Minister Tom Kauffman

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## Words from Tom

As I bring my work in Ohio Conference to a close, I am in a reflective mood. I did not aspire to the conference minister role. I was attracted to and invigorated by the regional pastor assignment. After 18 years of congregational ministry, I had a clear idea of what kind of pastoral resourcing I would have liked to have received. Joining a conference structure that was attempting to provide such to its pastors was a welcome opportunity for me. And it was most enjoyable to work with that original team in 1995. Two and a half years later I was asked to assume the conference minister role. I felt called by the Executive Committee and affirmed by the delegate body. But I never dreamed I'd do this work for the next 18 years!

Now it seems right to resume pastoral ministry in a setting that will take me away from Ohio Conference. It seems right to get out of the way and allow something else to emerge here in the conference. And it seems right to re-engage a local congregation that is seeking to determine what their next chapter of congregational life may look like.

The state of the conference is vastly different than it was 20 years ago. Our culture is vastly different. And we, as individuals, also have changed. Paul Schrag, in his editorial comments on the Kansas City assembly in the July 20, 2015, *Mennonite World Review*, writes that the convention delegates "walked the same convention halls but inhabited different worlds." I sometimes have felt that way working among our congregations here in Ohio Conference. About the two resolutions on the question of homosexuality before the delegates, Schrag wrote, "it was hard to argue with anyone who said the gulf between the two resolutions was too wide for any bridge to cross." Many I spoke to left the convention hall with a sense that this conundrum would not easily be resolved, if at all!

But at the same convention we heard messages from one of my favorite New Testament passages — Luke 24. In the midst of the despair and desolation felt by those two travelers on the road to Emmaus, came this figure whom they did not initially recognize. Yet the one who was mildly annoying to them at first became recognized as the Risen Christ who re-oriented their thinking and their disposition.

It was another reminder — we seem to constantly need these — that the unstoppable restoration of all things has begun. It has not begun, nor is it unfolding, in the way we had anticipated. And the cross reminds us that we cannot live under the illusion that life will be easy or painless. Suffering, costly discipleship is an integral part of the Christian life. But God's promise (which many of us memorized in John 3:16-17) is that the process of deliverance and salvation has already begun and cannot be stopped or thwarted. We may not know the timetable by which it will come to fruition and completion. But we do have the assurance that it **will** come to pass. And we can join that enterprise right now, wherever we find ourselves and in whatever set of circumstances we may be.

I agree with Schrag that this gulf (as with many others in the history of the Christian movement) seems too wide for any bridge to cross. But because of the resurrection and the experience of those followers on the road to Emmaus, I also believe that no gulf is too wide for the cross to bridge. God's reconciling purpose will not be thwarted; it cannot be stopped. That is the hope that has sustained me for the 20 years of ministry in Ohio Conference. It is the hope that sustained me before, and it is the hope that I carry into my future role. That is the hope I leave with you. Abundant Grace and Peace to all!

