

# Youth Ministry

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## Online Resources

There are three resources you should be able to access on the Ohio Conference website created as a result of my work this past year.

The longer document is a summary of my conversations with pastors and describes how churches in the conference are living out an Anabaptist Youth Ministry. There is also a

meaningful. The final document is a best practices report on joint youth groups based on my research on this practice among some of our churches.

I appreciate the warmth of fellowship I experienced in the Ohio Conference this past year. I highly cherish the relationships which this sabbatical allowed me to strengthen and also



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document that gives a window into the practice of baptism among Conference churches. Church leaders may be interested in reading how other churches practice baptism as a way to make their own congregation's baptismal experiences more

the new friends and colleagues in ministry with whom I was able to meet and interact. God's blessings to you, your congregation, and your conference as you seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ in your lives and ministry.

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For more information about the Ohio Conference, see the

Conference website: [www.ohiomennoniteconference.org](http://www.ohiomennoniteconference.org)

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## Randy Keeler reflects on year spent as Conference youth ministry resource

### By Dr. Randy Keeler

During the 2014-2015 academic year I had the privilege of spending my sabbatical from Bluffton University as youth ministry resource person for the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA. Besides serving as a resource to congregations in specific situations when called upon, I also planned six workshops for youth workers in different locations around the state in an attempt to make them accessible to all the constituent churches.

### Meeting with Pastors

An especially valuable experience for me was meeting with 49 pastors and sometimes other youth leaders of the 73 churches in the Conference to hear more about their respective youth ministries and to gain information about how they were attempting to live out an Anabaptist youth ministry

approach in their specific locations. This article will summarize the workshop experiences as well as give an overview of some of the other aspects of my work.



Randy Keeler

At the beginning of my work, Conference Minister Tom Kauffman and I agreed that it would be helpful to pull together an advisory group from the Conference to help me focus my work in areas that might be most helpful. The group consisted of Heather Miller from Orrville Mennonite, Andrew Michaels from Camp Luz, Craig Stras-

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Supporting  
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baugh from Kidron Mennonite, and Alex Dye from Oak Grove Mennonite (West Liberty). We agreed that an area of resourcing missing in the Conference was some basic youth ministry training for lay workers.

This agreement spawned the planning of six area workshops geared specifically for these lay workers.

### Youth Leader Workshops

The basic theme of these workshops involved attempting to help the participants think through why they do what they do in youth ministry, and to consider whether what they do is consistent with an Anabaptist approach to youth ministry, making them unique to other ministries in their communities. A question that also was addressed was, "Is what you are doing programmatically reaching the youth in their context as to where they are at spiritually?" Workshops were held in Wayne County (Orrville), West Liberty (Oak Grove), Archbold (Central), Spartansburg, Pa. (Valley View), Columbiana (Midway), and Holmes



Dr. Randy Keeler served as a youth ministry resource for the Ohio Conference during 2014-15. Above, he leads a workshop for youth leaders in northwest Ohio.

County (Berlin). Twenty-four of the Conference churches participated in these workshops with 54 youth workers present. In addition to these workshops, I also did two workshops at Annual Conference Assembly, one on "baptism" and the other on "joint youth groups." The workshop on baptism was an outgrowth of my conversations with pastors and focused on how baptism was practiced in congregational life, from the point of invitation to the actual baptismal service, and then even follow-up after the event. The workshop on joint youth groups shared insights I had gained from observing and analyzing the two joint youth groups which exist within the Conference (one in Wayne County

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and the other in Columbiana County) and also through conversations with conference ministers from other conferences where joint youth groups exist or may have existed at one time. These last two workshops were reasonably well-attended with around 12-15 participants at each one.

### Youth Pastor Meetings

In November 2014, a meeting was held at Camp Luz for Ohio Conference youth pastors. The intent of the day was for dialogue and information sharing regarding youth ministry resources. While only a handful of youth pastors were able to attend, it was an important day in welcoming two of the newer youth pastors in the Conference and for networking.

### Men's Retreat

In March I was the resource person for the Camp Luz men's retreat around the theme "Sticky Faith." The intent of the weekend was to encourage men to be leaders in their homes and churches and serve as a model for the young men in their realm of influence.

There were a few churches I interacted with who had some specific resourcing questions, but not the number I would have expected. My impression was that many pastors and churches were a bit distracted

this past year by larger denominational issues and were struggling with how to communicate these with their congregations, and as a result, the amount of time left for intentional youth ministry reflection was affected.

### Anabaptist Youth Ministry

One of the greatest joys in my work was meeting with pastors and hearing about their respective youth ministries. In some places youth ministry appears to be thriving. In other locations, a decreasing demographic of youth has caused the necessity to rethink how youth ministry should be carried out in their specific context. The goal of my conversations was to obtain information as to how churches in the Ohio Conference have lived out an approach to youth ministry that would reflect an Anabaptist perspective. Specifics as to what constitutes an Anabaptist approach to youth ministry can be seen in the May-June issue of the *Ohio Mennonite Evangel* and also in the document linked on the Conference website titled, "Anabaptist Youth Ministry Revisited." In short, an Anabaptist approach to youth ministry involves a three-fold foci of discipleship, community, and peace and nonviolence that is nuanced to distinctive understandings within the Anabaptist tradition.

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