

Minutes of the 46th Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

Martins Creek Mennonite Church

March 13-14, 2015

Theme — Hospitality — An Unexpected Invitation

Friday, March 13, 1:15–3 p.m.

A1. **Call to Order** — Moderator Dean Beck welcomed the delegates and called the meeting to order.

A2. **Opening Song** — Rhoda Mast of Millersburg Mennonite Church led an opening song, “What is this place.”

A3. **Invocation** —Conference Minister Tom Kauffman opened the meeting with prayer.

A4. **Ohio Conference is ...** — Tom Kauffman and Coordinator of Volunteers Alysa Short showed delegates a PowerPoint presentation titled “Ohio Conference is...,” which included facts about the composition of the Ohio Conference.

A5. **Introduction and Blessing of New Pastors** —Conference Minister Tom Kauffman and Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Wanda Stopher introduced pastors who have begun new assignments during the past year. Pastors in new assignments include Rick Stoner (Sharon), Kevin Kellum (Grace), Linda Short (Toledo), Nick Ladd (Salem — Waldron, Mich.), Wendell Slagell (Huber), Andy Stoner (Huber), Randy Carr (Beaverdam), Jeff Hochstetler (Berlin), Justin Smith (Smithville), George O’Reilly (First — Canton), and Rod Miller (Maple Grove — Hartville). After the introductions, the delegates had a time of prayer for the new pastors, including a blessing from the retired pastors in attendance.

A6. **Moderator’s Opening Comments** —Moderator Dean Beck had several opening comments to share with the delegates. He reminded delegates of the theme for this assembly, and read the theme scripture, Romans 12:9-13. He asked that delegates be open in our time together. This past year has been a tough year for the Conference. One issue has taken a huge amount of time, and some churches have left the Conference and Mennonite Church USA. He mentioned several positive things about the past year, including the grants which have been given, the chance to meet with congregations, the hiring of Alysa Short as coordinator of volunteers, working with Randy Keeler, the study materials developed for the special delegate session, town hall meetings with Mennonite Church USA Executive Director Ervin Stutzman, stewardship conversations with congregations, and Conference-wide pastor meetings. Let us work together in love and understanding.

A7. **Introduction of the Resolutions Committee** —Moderator Dean Beck also introduced the three members of the Resolutions Committee: Dave Maurer, Sara Meyer and Marvin Zuercher.

A8. Instructions for Table Groups —Dean Beck introduced Allen Rutter of Shalom Counseling and Mediation Center, who gave instructions for the Circle Process, which is being used with table groups this year. The Circle Process is a tool for discernment and seeking out God's will. Allen noted that because it has been a difficult year, we may have certain expectations and possibly some anxiety about participating in business sessions at this assembly. He has been praying for this ACA. He gave the invitation for delegates to share their convictions. The Circle Process provides a safe space to discuss painful, difficult issues, and it is used in many places. The goals of the process are to find resolutions that serve every member of the circle and to improve relationships and resolve differences. Every member has the chance to share his or her perspective in a safe place. The Circle Process acknowledges relationship building before discussing difficult issues. Allen gave delegates a reminder of their baptismal vows, including the commitment to discern together what is the will of God. The Circle Process emphasizes patience, humility, and deep listening, realizing that all are worthy of respect.

Allen listed several key elements of the Circle Process:

- Participants are accountable to one another face to face.
- It emphasizes equality of power and influence, connectedness.
- The circle is a safe place, and participants show respect for one another and kindness.
- Speak for yourself.
- Talk only when you have the talking piece. All others are listening, not just waiting for their turn to talk.

This year the talking piece for each table group is a kaleidoscope donated by Lehman's Hardware. Allen instructed delegates not to interrupt when someone else is talking. He asked them to do deep listening and ask for clarification when needed.

A9. Table Group Introductions —Delegates took time to introduce themselves to the others in their table groups.

A10. Minutes of the 2014 ACA —Moderator Dean Beck led delegates in a review of the minutes of the 2014 Annual Conference Assembly, noting numerous highlights.

Motion — There was a motion to accept the minutes of the 2014 Annual Conference Assembly.

Motion — Dan Hooley/Second — Griffin Long/Carried — None opposed

A11. Release and Lament of Congregations — Tom Kauffman and the regional pastors led the delegates in a litany of lament and blessing for those congregations which have chosen to leave the Ohio Conference. Those congregations are Hartville Mennonite Church, Walnut Creek Mennonite Church, North Clinton Mennonite Church and Springdale Chapel. In addition, St. Johns Mennonite Chapel has decided to close.

Motion — There was a motion to release Hartville Mennonite Church, Walnut Creek Mennonite Church, North Clinton Mennonite Church, Springdale Chapel and St. Johns Mennonite Chapel from

membership in the Ohio Conference. Motion – Naomi Engle/ Second – Rachel Kauffman/ Carried (with several opposed)

A12. **Constitutional Amendment** —Del Hostetler, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, introduced a proposed amendment to the Ohio Conference Constitution which would require all members of the Credentialing Ministry and Gifts Discernment Ministry to be affirmed by delegates at Annual Conference Assembly. The proposed amendment reads as follows (with the added language in italics):

Article X - Standing Groups

D. Gifts Discernment Ministry

4. Functions

b. Recommend Nominees in due time for:

2) Members of Standing Ministries in consultation with the respective chairpersons *for Conference Assembly action.*

Motion – There was a motion to approve the amendment to the Ohio Conference Constitution as presented. Motion — Alan Kauffman/Second —Dave Maurer/Carried (none opposed)

A13. **Introduction and Action on Gifts Discernment Slate** —Del Hostetler reviewed the Gifts Discernment Ministry process and asked for suggestions of names of persons who would be a good fit for the positions available. He introduced the nominees on the current slate, and he asked delegates to mark their Gifts Discernment ballots. Members of the Gifts Discernment Ministry were asked to collect the ballots at the end of the business session.

A14. **Missional Story** —Doug Zehr, pastor of Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, thanked delegates for the grant funding which was received for Bega Kwa Bega (Shoulder 2 Shoulder). He noted that five work teams had served for two weeks each in Kenya, working on construction at the International Impact College. Volunteers came from Oak Grove, Smithville, Crown Hill, Lee Heights, and Sonnenberg. They are anticipating visits this summer from their partners in Kenya.

A15. **Presentation of Resolution** —Dean Beck introduced the resolution regarding the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* which was prepared by the Ohio Conference Leadership Team with input from pastors from the Wayne County area. Conference leaders have been listening for the past six months at cluster meetings and pastor-peer meetings. Dean acknowledged that there is a diversity of opinions on this issue. He asked that delegates with suggestions for amendments to the resolution put their suggestions in writing and give them to the Resolutions Committee by the end of the day's discussion.

A16. **Resource Advocate Report** —Coordinator of Volunteers Alysa Short referred to the report on page 46 of the report book. Kris Nussbaum has resigned her volunteer position as Ohio Conference Resource Advocate. The Conference is still looking for a replacement for her. Alysa asked that delegates contact her if they are interested in serving in this way or know of someone who would be a good fit for the

position. Resource advocates receive training about what resources are available from Mennonite Church agencies and share that information with individuals in their conferences.

A17. Everence Mission and Purpose —Jim Frado, Everence managing director for Northeast Ohio, spoke about the mission of Everence, which is an agency of Mennonite Church USA. Everence has celebrated its 70th anniversary, and it is now a \$2.1 billion organization offering a variety of financial services. In addition to members of Mennonite Church USA, Everence also serves members of several other denominations, including Friends, Methodists, and Church of the Nazarene, as well as educational institutions such as Malone University and Ashland University. Everence has gone through many changes over the years, but its mission has never wavered: to honor Christ and remain committed to the call to stewardship, integrating faith into financial decisions. Everence is committed to working together to enrich our communities and has given back through sharing fund grants and the Rebate for Missions program. Everence is committed to the Purposeful Plan of Mennonite Church USA, especially the focus on stewardship. Jim Frado also announced Lois Bontrager's retirement as church relations representative for Northeast Ohio at the end of March 2015.

A18. Youth Ministry Advocate Report —Dr. Randy Keeler, associate professor of religion at Bluffton University, reported to delegates about his experience of serving as a youth ministry resource to Ohio Conference congregations during the 2014-15 academic year. He noted that it has been a pleasure to work among the people of the Ohio Conference. He visited with 49 pastors, and held a gathering of youth pastors in November. He is open to working more intentionally with individual congregations. He has been investigating how well joint youth groups work and will be reporting his findings during a workshop at Annual Conference Assembly. He also coordinated a Google chat on this topic with Rachel Gerber, denominational minister for youth and young adults for Mennonite Church USA. He noted that he will be the input speaker at the Men's Retreat at Camp Luz March 20-22, and that he will be leading workshops for youth workers this spring in at least five separate locations. He will formulate a final report about his experience this summer, focusing on an Anabaptist approach to youth ministry throughout the Conference.

A19. Introduction of Conference Visitors —Conference Minister Tom Kauffman introduced visitors from various church agencies.

A20. Announcements and Welcome —Jay Conn, pastor at Martins Creek Mennonite Church, welcomed delegates, explained information about the facilities, and shared several announcements.

3-3:45 p.m. — Displays and Snacks

Business Session # 2 (Family Life Center)

A21. Opening Song — Rhoda Mast of Millersburg Mennonite Church led an opening song, "Holy Spirit, come with power."

A22. Missional Story — Andy Stoner, pastoral team member at Huber Mennonite Church, and Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, reported about the pastor in-service workshops about

pornography and cyber-sex addiction which Andy led. These workshops, which were funded by a grant from the Ministry Development Team, took place during the fall. Churches need to face this problem and deal with it. This problem influences a large number of men, and quite a few women as well. Andy mentioned two book resources: *The Drug of the New Millennium* by Mark B. Kastleman and *The Pornography Trap* by Mark R. Laaser. He noted that pornography can be a problem for pastors as well. There are options for addressing this problem, and resources are available. He encouraged delegates to contact him for more information. We as churches need to be more intentional about God's plan for sexuality. We need to be aware of this problem and start talking about it, and we need to be in prayer for our pastors. Andy led a prayer for our pastors and congregations.

A23. Rationale for the Action Plan — Dean Beck referred to the resolution proposed by the Ohio Conference Leadership Team. He specifically noted the action steps which are included with the resolution, and referred to the footnotes which further explain sections of the resolution and the action steps. A copy of the proposed resolution (minus the footnotes which were included) follows:

Resolution: Ohio Conference fully supports the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Given the cultural context we inhabit, we emphasize our support of Article 19, "Family, Singleness & Marriage," while valuing all 24 articles as a guide for our life together.

Action steps:

CREDENTIALING MINISTRY TEAM:

- Will not recognize a congregation's request to credential a pastor in a same-sex relationship.
- Will review the credentials of any Conference-credentialed pastor who performs a same-sex ceremony, determining the appropriate sanctions.

LEADERSHIP TEAM:

- Will conduct a review of the Five-Year Plan and current Conference leadership and leadership structure.
- Will have discussion with all Ohio Conference pastors to explore what it would take to see recommitment to each other within Ohio Conference.
- Will facilitate ongoing conversations between pastors using face-to-face communication and use digital technology to communicate to Ohio Conference churches what the Leadership Team is doing.

Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, responded to a question about the phrase "determining appropriate sanctions," which was included in the proposed action steps. She referred to the denomination's updated ministerial polity handbook, *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership: A Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*. In this handbook, several terms related to pastors' credentials are defined as follows:

- Probation – The pastor is under close supervision for a specific period of time. The credentialing body meets to decide whether the pastor’s credential should be active, suspended or withdrawn.
- Suspension – The pastor’s credential is laid aside for a specific period of time, and then it is up to the credentialing body to determine next steps.
- Terminated – The removal of a pastor’s credential because of disciplinary action.
- Withdrawn – The pastor’s credential is ended because of non-disciplinary reasons.

It was noted that someone had placed a proposed amended version of the Leadership Team’s resolution on the delegate tables. Since the Resolutions Committee had not yet met, they had not had a chance to review this proposed amended resolution, and delegates were instructed to lay it aside.

A24. **Prayer** — Dana Short led delegates in prayer for the discussion process.

A25. **Table Discussion of the Proposed Resolution** —The delegates discussed several questions about their congregation’s relationship to Ohio Conference and also the proposed resolution.

A26. **A Report of Vote for the Gifts Discernment Slate** — Del Hostetler, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, reported that 216 ballots for the Gifts Discernment Slate were received. Two hundred one delegates affirmed all the people on the ballot, resulting in an affirmation rate of 93 percent.

A27. **Announcements** — Jay Conn made several announcements.

5-6 p.m. — Workshops/Displays

6:15-7:15 p.m. — Dinner

6:15-7:15 p.m. — Pastor Appreciation Meal (Berlin Mennonite)

7:40-9 p.m. — Worship #1 (Sanctuary)

Saturday, March 14

7-8 a.m. — Ohio Mennonite Women’s Breakfast (Millersburg Mennonite)

7-8 a.m. — Mennonite Men’s Breakfast (Berlin Mennonite)

8:10-8:25 a.m. — Prayer Time (Room #102)

8:30-10 a.m. — Business Session #3 (Family Life Center)

A28. **Announcement** — Dean Beck reminded delegates to turn in their copies of the delegate checklist by noon.

A29. **Opening Song** — Fran Mast of Martins Creek Mennonite Church led delegates in an opening song, “Holy, holy, holy.”

A30. Missional Story — Scott Coulter of Toledo Mennonite Church shared information about the tutoring program at Toledo Mennonite. TMC Tutoring received a grant from the Ohio Conference Ministry Development Team to help fund an intern from Toledo Campus Ministry who mentors the teen volunteers who are tutoring the children. About 12 tutors are volunteers in the program. Scott Coulter expressed thanks to Ohio Conference for the grant funding.

A31. Introduction of the Spending Plan — Keith Hostetler and Matt Hochstetler of the Stewardship Ministry introduced the proposed Ohio Conference narrative spending plan for 2015-16. They noted that the plan includes a net increase of about 3 percent in pastors' salaries for the coming year. The spending plan is factoring in a decrease of congregational giving of about \$100,000, and an increase of individual giving of about \$10,000. The Conference is committed to one more year of the Five-Year Plan to Increase Staffing. They noted that the Stewardship Ministry realizes that continuing to spend these amounts is not sustainable. One clarification was given: Line 58 is actually accumulated surplus.

Funding has come from generous giving, and the Conference has a responsibility to spend wisely. Keith Hostetler shared information about various fund balances. There is about \$10,000 available for grants in 2015-16. One possibility is to use earnings from the Endowment Fund in grant funding.

Open mic time for questions —

Jim Bartholomew (Dayspring) — He would like to clarify about what delegates voted on at the 2012 Annual Conference Assembly in Berne, Ind. At that time, delegates were told that there was \$325,000 available. As he remembers that meeting, delegates agreed to use \$125,000 for a reserve fund, and the remaining \$200,000 was to be used for projects. Later he was told that the intention was to use 20 percent of those funds for projects. Why are we not tapping into the reserve fund, since this seems to be a "rainy day"?

Answer: Keith Hostetler said he was not clear on details from the meeting at Berne. The Five-Year Plan did have budgeted deficits. The Conference has not had to tap into reserve funds for the Five-Year Plan as much as had been expected. However, the Conference's income also is not as high as was projected in the Five-Year Plan.

Kevin Trent (Smithville) — This budget is concerning. This deficit spending is not sustainable. Giving has decreased, and it seems possible that it will continue to decrease. We should think about contingency plans. Possibly cuts are needed.

Answer: Stewardship Ministry and Leadership Team have agreed to keep a close watch on this. We will be watching monthly. If significant changes come in the Conference, we can make changes in the budget.

Griffin Long (First- Canton) — Why is the projected deficit not even larger?

Answer: We are hoping for recommitment to the Conference, and then funding will follow. The thinking was that it was best to go forward in faith that congregations will remain faithful to Ohio Conference. One additional note: The numbers shown for 2014-15 don't include figures from February and March.

Scott Coulter (Toledo Mennonite) – He asked a question about one of the papers handed out to delegates which shows a surplus. Where is the surplus from?

Answer: The surplus funds are from previous years in which the Conference ended its fiscal year with a surplus.

Haroldo Nunes (Salem – Wooster) – When we approved the Five-Year Plan we agreed to keep looking at how things were going. How did we get to this point? He thinks we should be using this surplus money for missions. We need to be responsible with our money.

A question-and-answer session about the Conference spending plan will be held at 10:15 a.m. All interested delegates are invited to attend.

A32. Credentialing Ministry Team Report — Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, introduced the members of the Credentialing Ministry team. The team gave an outline of the credentialing process. There is an interview process both for licensing and ordination, and the congregation starts the process. The Credentialing Ministry offers scholarships for credentialed persons. They are working to hold pastors accountable while seeking a healthy balance of grace and truth. Delegates were thanked for their prayers for the Credentialing Ministry team as they work.

A33. Table Discussion on Action Plan of Leadership Team Resolution — Allen Rutter reminded delegates about the Circle Process that everyone is asked to use in table group discussion times. He encouraged everyone to listen deeply and to honor the process.

Dean Beck reminded delegates that the Leadership Team developed the proposed resolution with input from a group of pastors in Wayne County and from meetings around the Conference. The Resolutions Committee has developed three proposed amendments to the resolution based on delegate submissions. Copies of these proposed amendments were distributed.

Dana Short led the delegates in a time of prayer, and reminded them to become aware of God's presence with us.

Delegates spent time discussing the proposed amendments.

Todd Martin of Smithville Mennonite Church made a motion to adopt the document distributed to delegates as "Amendment #2." This motion was seconded by John Leunk. Amendment #2 reads as follows:

Resolution: Ohio Conference fully supports the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Given the cultural context we inhabit, we emphasize our support of Article 19, "Family, Singleness & Marriage," while valuing all 24 articles as a guide for our life together. Therefore, we will withdraw the credentials of any minister who performs a homosexual union and deny credentials to any unrepentant homosexual minister.

Open mic —

Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, was asked to restate the definition of several terms regarding pastors' credentials which she had talked about during the second business session. These terms come from the denomination's updated ministerial polity handbook, *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership: A Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*. The terms are as follows:

- Terminate – to remove the credential because of misconduct
- Withdraw – to end a credential because of non-disciplinary reasons
- Probation – The pastor is under close supervision for a specific period of time. The credentialing body meets to decide whether the pastor's credential should be active, suspended or withdrawn.
- Suspended – A pastor is not allowed to perform ministerial functions during this time.

Jeff Kauffman (Zion) — He wants to acknowledge a sense of mistrust of leadership expressed in these business sessions. He does not share this lack of trust in Conference leadership, and he grieves the level of mistrust. He said he trusts Conference leadership to carry out the action steps listed in the resolution proposed by the Leadership Team.

Dan Hooley (First Mennonite – Canton) — He called for delegates to use the Circle Process to discuss this proposed amendment.

A34. Youth Leadership Project Report — Rowan Miller of Berlin Mennonite Church spoke about his experience with the Youth Leadership Project, a youth leadership development experience led by Jeremy Kauffman and Bethany Nussbaum. The experience includes two weekend-long retreats, and each youth is asked to do an individual project. The second weekend retreat is a time for reporting on individual projects. Each youth works with a mentor from his or her congregation. Rowan reported that working with a mentor was incredibly beneficial for him. The Youth Leadership Project is being offered again this year under the name LEAD3D. He urged delegates to encourage the youth in their congregations to participate.

A35. Pastor-Spouse Retreat — Nan Kanagy and Paula Snyder Belousek reported on plans for the Pastor-Spouse Retreat, which will be held in November. They noted that pastors need time to step away from their duties, rest, and be renewed. Michael and Sue Conrad Howes will be the speaker couple for this retreat.

A36. Announcements — Dean Beck announced that the Friday evening offering totaled \$2,082. Jay Conn also made several announcements.

10-10:45 – Displays and Snacks

10:15-10:45 – Conference Spending Plan Question Session (Room 111)

Present: Griffin Long, Keith Hostetler, Matt Hochstetler, Del Hostetler, Ilene Nofziger, Stan Helmuth, Sher Byler, Art Neuenschwander, Ann Leaman, Dennis Showalter, Tim Singenstreu, Greg Meyer, Dan Sauder, Kevin Trent, Dawn Cullar, Bob Eshleman, Thomas Dunn, Jeff Hochstetler, Jim Bartholomew

The group discussed what would happen if delegates did not vote to approve the proposed spending plan. The Ohio Conference Constitution does not specifically address this question. According to our parliamentarian, John Rohrer, if a new spending plan is not in place when the new fiscal year starts, the Conference would need to revert to the previous spending plan (budget). Two members of the Stewardship Ministry in attendance, Keith Hostetler and Matt Hochstetler, noted a problem with that possible outcome: the previous spending plan is even less sustainable than the spending plan which is being proposed.

One person in attendance noted that at least one congregation will be taking a special offering for Ohio Conference tomorrow. Could other congregations do that as well?

Responding to a question about the current fiscal year, Ohio Conference Financial Coordinator Stan Helmuth noted that the books have not yet been closed for February, but there will be a surplus for the month.

There will probably be a \$50,000-\$80,000 shortfall for this year. The Stewardship Ministry and Leadership Team have a commitment to look at where we are at financially in two months from today.

Keith Hostetler and Matt Hochstetler noted that the Stewardship Ministry does not have authority to cut Ohio Conference staff.

In response to the question about who makes the ultimate financial decisions for the Conference, Stewardship Ministry members in attendance noted that the Ohio Conference Leadership Team makes operational decisions. The Stewardship Ministry can advise, but Leadership has the authority to decide.

It was noted that Ohio Conference delegates were the ones who approved the Five-Year Plan to increase Conference staffing. However, because some congregations have left the Conference, it is possible that adjustments should be made.

Some delegates suggested that one way to move forward would be to decide to work within the boundaries of the revenue received by the Conference. For example, delegates could decide that expenses should not exceed a certain percentage above the revenue received. One suggestion was that spending be limited to no more than 35 percent in excess of revenue. Keith Hostetler and Matt Hochstetler of the Stewardship Ministry invited all those who were interested in exploring this idea to meet during lunch to work on developing a resolution to present to the entire delegate body.

10:45-Noon – Worship #2 (Sanctuary)

12:15-1:10 p.m. – Lunch

1:10-2:10 p.m. – Workshops and Displays

2:15-4 p.m. – Business Session #4 (Family Life Center)

A37. Opening Song — Fran Mast led delegates in singing “God of our strength.”

A38. Missional Story — Reed Jones of Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty spoke about his experience with the project called *The Mustard Seed Sessions*, which was inspired by his purchase of an old guitar in need of repair. He subsequently used the restored guitar to record several hymn arrangements. All the proceeds from the EP recording of the music benefit the spiritual development program at Adriel School. This project received a grant from the Ohio Conference Ministry Development Team. Reed also shared a song on the guitar titled “Jewels.”

A39. Ministry Development Team Report — Assistant Moderator Rachel Kauffman reported on the work of the Ohio Conference Ministry Development Team. Ohio Conference’s focus areas are worship, faith and witness. The Ministry Development Team sent a survey to all churches, and overwhelmingly people reported wanting information rather than workshops. Ministry Development Team continues to support Conference congregations in a variety of ways, such as through the grants which have been given, the *Prayer Prompter* newsletter, and a young adult ministry article in *Ohio Mennonite Evangel*. Upcoming events include the Pastor-Spouse Retreat, an orientation for new pastors, the Mentor-Mentee Retreat for Pastors, the Youth Leadership Project (LEAD3D), and the Women in Ministry Retreat. Money for these programs is coming from the 2014-15 spending plan.

A40. Denominational Report — Terry Shue of Mennonite Church USA told about being in an earthquake in Harper, Kan. An earthquake shakes up your equilibrium. Many parts of church today feel like there is an earthquake coming through, and some things seem to be moving. There is a struggle of holiness versus justice (as if two can’t coexist). New alignments are being made, and old ones are being ignored or broken. Some congregations are positioning themselves to break away. He reported that he is often given sympathy by people who say they don’t want his job. He reminded delegates of the advice found in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” As he travels, he sees God at work in the churches, and people proclaiming the kingdom of God. The church is alive and well. See what God is inviting us to join. The path is still unclear. He urged delegates to reject anxiety, fear and anger, and advised them to hold the structures loosely. He asked a question: “What if God is dismantling the church to make something new to come?” He has great confidence that church will go on.

Karla Minter of Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) spoke to delegates, reminding them that MMN partners with people and congregations to do ministry across the street and around the world. We want people to encounter the whole Gospel. We are to be ambassadors of Christ in the world today. How can we fully embody Christ’s reconciling ministry?

Terry Shue told delegates that the denominational leaders want to hear from them. Delegates to the denominational convention, KC 2015, are asked to complete a survey. KC 2015 will take place June 30-July 5, and it will be a time of worship, discernment and fellowship.

Terry Shue prayed for the Ohio Conference, asking for God’s spirit to be present in these sessions.

A41. Narrative Spending Plan and Spending Plan Resolution — Keith Hostetler and Matt Hochstetler of the Stewardship Ministry introduced a proposed resolution regarding Conference finances. The

proposed resolution is intended to increase accountability and to ensure that funds designated for other purposes are not used for operations.

Open Mic —

Scott Coulter (Toledo) — How would money be put back into the operating reserve fund?

Answer: Stewardship Ministry would have to decide which fund to put money into.

Motion — In any fiscal year, the Ohio Conference shall not spend on its spending plan more than 135 percent of congregational and individual giving, and total spending shall not exceed the sum of congregational and individual giving and the amount of funds in the operating reserve fund and short-term accumulated surplus. The source of the spending plan funds shall be congregational and individual giving, operating reserve fund, and short-term accumulated surplus. Motion – Keith Hostetler/ Seconded /Carried

Motion — A motion was made to approve the 2015-16 Narrative Spending Plan for the Ohio Conference as presented. Motion –Keith Hostetler/Second –Steve Steiner/Carried (not unanimous)

A42. Table Discussion on Proposed Resolution — It was reported that Todd Martin had withdrawn his motion from the previous business session.

There was a motion by Steve Steiner and seconded by Shawn Childs to adopt the following resolution as presented by the Leadership Team :

Resolution: Ohio Conference fully supports the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Given the cultural context we inhabit, we emphasize our support of Article 19, “Family, Singleness & Marriage,” while valuing all 24 articles as a guide for our life together.

Action steps:

CREDENTIALING MINISTRY TEAM:

- Will not recognize a congregation’s request to credential a pastor in a same-sex relationship.
- Will review the credentials of any Conference-credentialed pastor who performs a same-sex ceremony, determining the appropriate sanctions.

LEADERSHIP TEAM:

- Will conduct a review of the Five-Year Plan and current Conference leadership and leadership structure.
- Will have discussion with all Ohio Conference pastors to explore what it would take to see recommitment to each other within Ohio Conference.
- Will facilitate ongoing conversations between pastors using face-to-face communication and use digital technology to communicate to Ohio Conference churches what the Leadership Team is doing.

Todd Martin made a motion, seconded by John Leunk, to amend the resolution to read as follows:

Resolution: Ohio Conference fully supports the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Given the cultural context we inhabit, we emphasize our support of Article 19, "Family, Singleness & Marriage," while valuing all 24 articles as a guide for our life together. Therefore, we will withdraw the credentials of any minister who performs a homosexual union and deny credentials to any unrepentant homosexual minister.

Delegates spent time discussing the amended resolution with members of their table groups.

Open mic time —

Darrin Snyder Belousek (Salem - Elida) – He expressed concern about some of the language of the amendment. In particular, the term "unrepentant homosexual" makes no distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual sexual activity. If Ohio Conference adopts this version of the resolution, we as a Conference would be at variance with the human sexuality statements adopted at Purdue and Saskatoon. He said that if we approve this amended resolution as it stands, we should also notify our sister conferences in Mennonite Church USA that we are at variance with denominational statements regarding sexuality.

Bob Sauder (Salem – Waldron) – He does not like the language of this amendment because it seems to be moving us toward a credal document instead of a confessional document. Let's continue to use the Confession of Faith as a confessional document.

Bill Seymour (Orrville) – He dislikes the polarizing tone of this amendment. He and people in his table group agree that they want to be consistent with the Confession of Faith. They would vote against this amendment because it does not include any face-to-face conversation or opportunity for repentance.

Randy Carr (Table 15) – He asked a question for clarification: If this amendment is adopted, would the action steps included in the original resolution still be included? (Parliamentarian John Rohrer advised that delegates first vote on the amendment before considering what parts of the original resolution would be included.) Also, what percentage would the amendment need to pass?

Moderator Dean Beck – The Leadership Team is open to delegate input about whether the amendment would need a simple majority to pass, or a supermajority (that is, at least 66.66 percent). By a show of hands, a majority of delegates indicated that they would want a supermajority for passage.

Bridget Troyer (Pike) – Her table group supports the original resolution brought by the Leadership Team. That resolution shows trust of Conference leadership. She does not think this amendment is the best way to go.

Jim Bartholomew (Dayspring) – His fear is that we will have a situation like the one in Allegheny Conference in which a resolution passes by a very slim margin, and unity is lacking. We need to come together or fall apart; a simple majority rule does not seem sufficient.

Heidi Childs (Oak Grove – West Liberty) – is the amount needed for passage the same for all votes?
Answer: Yes.

(Name not recorded) – Question for clarification: Would we still be able to deal with the original resolution if this amendment does not pass? Answer: Yes.

Delegates voted on the amended resolution by paper ballot. The results were as follows: No— 188 (82.1 percent) and Yes — 41 (17.9 percent). The amended resolution did not pass.

A43. Announcements — While votes were being counted, Moderator Dean Beck announced that an additional \$5,000 had been given toward the offering taken on Friday evening. Attendance figures for this ACA are as follows: Three hundred twenty people attended, including, 253 delegates from 60 congregations. Jay Conn announced that Martins Creek would be glad to have help with putting away rental tables and chairs at the end of this last business session.

A44. Drawing for Delegate Incentives — The winners of several gifts were announced. Janet Esh was the winner of a gift basket from Mennonite Mutual. There also was a drawing for gift baskets for delegates who had completed the delegate checklist. Winners were Tim Singenstreu of Salem Mennonite in Wooster, Bob Wilson from North Lima Mennonite, Vernice Bixler from Martins Mennonite and Joe Graber from First Mennonite in Berne.

A45. Resolution from Leadership Team —It was announced that the resolution as amended did not pass. Bill Seymour made a motion, seconded by Shannon Martin, to adopt an alternate amendment to the resolution, which had been distributed to delegates as “Amendment #1.” After some discussion, Bill Seymour agreed that all action steps should be included as part of the resolution.

Open mic time —

Thomas Dunn (Crown Hill) – His table group would suggest that the word “withdraw” be deleted from the resolution.

Bill Seymour (Orrville) — He would like to allow the credentialing body the ability to make the determination on the pastor’s credential. His main concern is that there is a chance for face-to-face interaction between the Credentialing Ministry and the pastor before permanent action is taken.

Millard Shrock (Pleasant View) – He would like all of the document to be binding.

Larry Wehr (Midway) – He prefers to see a task force seated to evaluate the leadership structure rather than having the Leadership Team doing the review.

Paula Snyder Belousek (Salem – Elida) – She asked for clarification on the area of dealing with a pastor’s credentials. Would probation, which is an option in the denominational polity manual, be a possibility?

Naomi Engle (Credentialing Ministry Chair) — As this amendment is written, it appears that there would be a suspension of the pastor’s credentials until a review would take place. Then the Credentialing Ministry would reinstate, terminate or withdraw the pastor’s credential.

Bill Seymour (Orrville) — When he proposed this language, he did not intend to rule out the possibility of probation for a pastor.

Motion: A motion to adopt the following resolution (including all action steps) was made:

Resolution:¹ Ohio Conference fully supports the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Given the cultural context we inhabit, we emphasize our support of Article 19, “Family, Singleness & Marriage,” while valuing all 24 articles as a guide for our life together.²

Action steps:

CREDENTIALING MINISTRY TEAM:³

- Will not recognize a congregation’s request to credential a pastor in a same-sex relationship.
- Will suspend the credentials of any Conference-credentialed pastor who performs a same-gender ceremony, until a review to determine whether to reinstate (with repentance and recommitment) or to terminate or withdraw credentials.

LEADERSHIP TEAM:

- Will conduct a review of the Five-Year Plan and current Conference leadership and leadership structure.⁴
- Will have discussion with all Ohio Conference pastors to explore what it would take to see recommitment to each other within Ohio Conference.⁵

¹Delegates voted to adopt this entire document as a resolution, including all action steps listed. These action steps will be followed through by the Credentialing Ministry Team and the Leadership Team.

² The Leadership Team wants to affirm that it believes in and upholds the entire Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995. However, in our current context we feel it is important to affirm that we believe in and will lead Ohio Conference in accordance to Article 19.

³ This information was published in the *Ohio Mennonite Evangel*, but the Leadership Team feels that it is important to list as an action step to affirm the work of the Credentialing Ministry Team and to assure Ohio Conference of where we stand on this issue.

⁴ Leadership Team has not yet decided how this will be done, but if the resolution is passed we will be tasked with doing this. Leadership Team may do this review process on its own, may seat a task force or hire an outside firm to conduct a review.

⁵ We are all aware that some churches have already left Ohio Conference and there are others considering leaving. Leadership Team will look into what needs to be done to foster commitment and re-commitment amongst Ohio Conference congregations.

- **Will facilitate ongoing conversations between pastors using face-to-face communication⁶ and use digital technology to communicate to Ohio Conference churches what the Leadership Team is doing.⁷**

The vote was taken by paper ballot. A total of 230 votes were cast, with 163 delegates voting yes (70.9 percent) and 67 voting no (29.1 percent). Two delegates abstained. M/S/C

A46. **Song** — Fran Mast led the delegates in a song, “All hail the power of Jesus’ name.”

A47. **Talking pieces** — Allen Rutter told delegates that one person from each table group would be able to take home a “talking piece” kaleidoscope given by Lehman’s Hardware. To determine who would receive the kaleidoscope, he asked the delegates to guess how Mennonites are in the world. The person at each table group whose number was closest to the correct number (1,700,000) got to take home the kaleidoscope.

A48. **Announcements** —Moderator Dean Beck made several final announcements regarding name tags and evaluation sheets. He expressed thanks to Jay Conn, Lori Miller and everyone else from Martins Creek, the hosts for this Annual Conference Assembly.

Recorded by Ann Leaman

⁶ The pastors that have been able to attend the all-Ohio Conference pastor meetings have shared that this sort of thing should happen more often. As the Leadership Team attempts to navigate Ohio Conference through these turbulent times, we will look to facilitate discussions amongst Ohio Conference pastors as much as possible to aid us in this process.

⁷ All of the above work will take time and cooperation. The Leadership Team will be seeking feedback and help from pastors and congregations in the process. Leadership Team will plan to communicate as much as possible the type of progress that is being made.