

Minutes of the 47th Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

Central Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio

March 11-12, 2016

Theme —Holy Ground: Founded on Christ, Flourishing in Faith

Friday, March 11

1-2:45 p.m. — Opening Worship

2:45-3:15 — Break/Displays/Snacks

3:15-4:45 p.m. — Business Session #1

A1. Call to Order — Assistant Moderator Thomas Dunn noted that Moderator Dean Beck is not able to participate this weekend because of health challenges. Thomas welcomed the delegates and led the group in prayer.

A2. Opening Song — Anita Roth of Central Mennonite Church led an opening song, “God of grace and God of glory” and encouraged the delegates to sing the song as a prayer.

A3. Introductions — Thomas Dunn introduced staff members and the members of the Leadership Team.

A4. Ohio Conference is... —Transitional Conference Leader George O’Reilly and Coordinator of Volunteers Alys 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 — George O’Reilly and Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford introduced pastors who have begun new assignments during the past year. Pastors in new assignments include Ora Shetler, Sonnenberg Mennonite; Linda Short, Lima Mennonite; Ernie Hershberger, Millersburg Mennonite; Glenn Nofziger, Martins Creek Mennonite; Shawn Hilliard, Martins Mennonite; Darwin Hartman, Pike Mennonite; and Regina Wenger, Central Mennonite. Credentialing Ministry members came forward for a prayer of blessing of these pastors.

A6. Instructions for Table Groups —Naomi Engle, chair of Credentialing Ministry, gave the delegates instructions for working in their table groups. The groups will be using the Circle Process. Table group leaders also may use the discussion format if they choose. Circle Process guidelines include the following:

- Speak for yourself.
- Listen deeply.

- Talk only when you have the talking piece.
- Leaders or group members may ask for prayer.

A7. Instructions on the Parliamentary Process — Parliamentarian Matt Hochstetler talked about parliamentary procedure for these meetings. Generally business meetings will follow *Robert's Rules of Order*. He noted one important difference: Major resolutions must be submitted to the Resolutions Committee by 6:15 p.m. today. While resolutions must be submitted to the Resolutions Committee, amendments may be made from the floor.

A8. Minutes of 2015 ACA — Thomas Dunn invited delegates to accept the minutes as presented.

Motion — There was a motion to accept the minutes of the 2015 Annual Conference Assembly.

Motion — Hank Rossiter / Second / Carried

A9. Year of Mission —Kevin Kanagy, Jason Rissler, and Jacob Dobson, members of the Ministry Development Team, introduced the Ohio Conference Year of Mission emphasis with a skit. All delegates have received a packet of information about the Year of Mission. The focus of the Year of Mission is on God's call to mission in our local context. Congregations are being encouraged to consider mission from an Anabaptist viewpoint. We want to develop a missional culture in the Conference.

A10. Release and Lament of Congregations — George O'Reilly and Ralph Reinford led the delegates in a litany of lament and blessing for those congregations which have chosen to leave the Ohio Conference. Those congregations are Longenecker Mennonite Church, Grace Community Church, Martins Creek Mennonite Church, Owl Creek Mennonite Church, Dayspring Christian Fellowship, Aurora Mennonite Church, and Moorhead Mennonite Church. In addition, Cornerstone Mennonite Fellowship has decided to close.

Motion — There was a motion to release Longenecker Mennonite Church, Grace Community Church, Martins Creek Mennonite Church, Owl Creek Mennonite Church, Dayspring Christian Fellowship, Aurora Mennonite Church and Moorhead Mennonite Church from membership in the Ohio Conference. Motion — Evan Wehr / Second — Pat King / Carried (with several opposed)

A11. Introduction and Action on Gifts Discernment Slate —Mel Hathaway, chair of Gifts Discernment Ministry, expressed appreciation for the work of the Gifts Discernment team. He introduced the slate of nominees, drew attention to the ballot, and asked delegates to fill out the form with suggestions of people for these positions. He also asked Gifts Discernment team members to stand, and gave special thanks to Coordinator of Volunteers Alysa Short, who provided leadership while he was on sabbatical. He noted that there are still several vacancies to be filled, and he introduced people who will be filling positions. After a prayer, delegates were asked to mark their Gifts Discernment ballots. Members of the Gifts Discernment team collected the ballots.

A12. Missional Story —Alex Dye, associate pastor at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty showed a brief video about "The Grove," an outreach location of the congregation which occupies space in downtown West Liberty. Oak Grove Pastor Dick Barrett also talked to delegates about this ministry

extension of the congregation. They recognized the call to do something different, and asked for the congregation to pray. The Oak Grove church building is six miles outside of town. “The Grove” is a storefront property in downtown West Liberty. During his sabbatical Dick Barrett was able to visit Journey Mennonite Church in Kansas and also attend a Sentralized Conference, which encouraged engagement with the local community. Oak Grove applied for and received an Ohio Conference ministry grant. The landlord offered to rent the property to the congregation at a reduced rental price if the congregation would do rehab work on the property. The Grove now is the site of numerous events and projects, and it is a partnership with community groups. Alex Dye thanked Ohio Conference for putting money toward these ideas.

A13. Table Group Introductions —Delegates took a few minutes to introduce themselves to the others in their table groups.

A14. Statement on Remaining with Mennonite Church USA — George O’Reilly presented the Leadership Team’s Statement on Remaining with Mennonite Church USA, which was developed after the All-Ohio Conference Pastors’ Meeting in January. A copy of this statement is included at the end of these minutes. The Leadership Team is not proposing structural changes in our relationship with Mennonite Church USA. However, the Leadership Team wanted to name areas of tension between some of our constituents and Mennonite Church USA, and they are hoping to enable mature conversation. Delegates will have the opportunity to discuss this statement in the next delegate session.

A15. Presentation of “Year of Covenant” —George O’Reilly introduced the proposed One-Year Covenant for Ohio Conference Congregations, Pastors, Conference Leaders and Staff. He is considering the possibility of scheduling a meeting of credentialed leaders for discussion, most likely on a Wednesday in mid-May. A possible discussion topic for this meeting would be the role of the Confession of Faith versus the use of creeds.

A16. Two-Tiered Membership Resolution —George O’Reilly Introduced a membership resolution proposed by the Ohio Conference Leadership Team. Congregations would have the option of being a member of Ohio Conference without being a member of Mennonite Church USA. The Leadership Team has determined that this resolution and any other major resolutions will require a two-thirds majority for passage. Delegates will have a chance to discuss this resolution in a later business session.

A17. Report on Gifts Discernment Action — Mel Hathaway reported that 182 delegates cast votes for the Gifts Discernment slate. One hundred seventy-seven delegates affirmed the entire ballot, which translates to a 97 percent approval rate.

A18. Announcements and Welcome — David Elkins, pastor of Central Mennonite, welcomed delegates and made several announcements.

5-6 p.m. —Workshops/Displays

6:15-7:15 p.m. — Dinner/Pastor Appreciation Meal

7:30-9 p.m. — Business Session #2

A19. Opening Song — Melissa Valentine of Central Mennonite Church led an opening song, “Lord I am fondly, earnestly.”

A20. Introduction of Conference Visitors — Transitional Conference Leader George O’Reilly introduced visitors from various church agencies.

A21. Everence/Lilly Grant — Jim Frado of Everence and Terry Shue of Mennonite Church USA talked to delegates about a program which is made possible by a grant from the Lilly Endowment. This program is a three-year initiative. Everence was notified in November 2015 about this \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, which is designed to address the financial challenges facing pastors. Everence is one of 27 organizations receiving grant money. The program has two main goals: 1. providing educational events for pastors and their spouses designed to improve personal financial skills; 2. providing financial grants for credentialed pastors facing economic difficulties. Everence is working with both Mennonite Church USA and the Conservative Conference in this initiative. Half of the funds will be available as matching funds for pastors needing financial assistance.

Jim Frado reported that Everence is meeting one-on-one with pastoral students. These students are being encouraged to meet with a financial planner. The cost of a financial plan is \$1,200. Under this program, the pastor or his or her congregation will pay a co-pay of \$200, and the Lilly Endowment will pay the balance. Terry Shue spoke about the pastoral financial assistance program. In this program, \$2,500 is available for pastors from Lilly when there is a matching grant from the pastor’s congregation.

A22. Statement on Remaining with MC USA — Thomas Dunn asked Eldon King to lead delegates in prayer for the time of discussion. Then delegates discussed the Leadership Team’s Statement on Remaining with Mennonite Church USA.

Open Mic —

Nate Hand (Table 7) – For the most part his table has affirmation for this statement, but they did have some concerns. For example, there was concern about how we are viewing the Confession of Faith. Are we holding the 1995 Confession of Faith too high, viewing it as an inerrant document? They would like to be able to express boundaries without being threatening.

Velma Shetler (Table 20) – Their group had questions about the wording relating to Mennonite Education Agency institutions since several colleges have changed their hiring policies. Also, how will direction for the Conference be set?

Scott Coulter (Table 4) – Their group had appreciation for staying with Mennonite Church USA so that our voices could be part of the continued denominational discussion. They expressed appreciation for the work of the Leadership Team, and they expressed concern about the wording relating to educational institutions.

Jan Sohar (Table 11) – What does the phrase “substantive changes” mean?

Alex Dye (Table 24) – His table group affirmed the fact that this document propels the conversation forward. They also affirm the concerns expressed regarding the Confession of Faith and boundaries. They are wondering if this statement will be taken to the Constituency Leaders Council.

Steve Schmid (Table 26) – His table group basically affirmed staying with MC USA. One concern is that this statement seems to take a negative approach. How can we make it a more positive approach?

Justin Guenther (Table 5) – There is general support of the resolution. However, they have some concerns about some of the wording of the statement, especially the wording about “substantive changes” and about MEA institutions. Also, they are wondering if this statement is addressing deeper issues, or whether it is just a surface fix?

Herb Hershberger (Table 15) – Some of his table group affirm the boundaries laid out in this statement. Some would like to remain with MC USA. Some believe the statement is not strong enough and is too ambiguous. They identified issues about Mennonite Education Agency, and felt they need more clarity. What does Ohio Conference really believe?

A23. Year of Covenant —The delegates spent time discussing the Year of Covenant proposal in their table groups.

Open Mic —

Kevin Himes (Table 18) – They were unanimous in support of this statement. They enjoy doing missions together, and they enjoy the fellowship and resourcing.

Haroldo Nunes (Table 20) – He also affirmed the value of relationships, and said that they value the role of Ohio Conference. The problem is when Mennonite Church USA is going in a different direction.

Dean Falb (Table 8) – There was affirmation for the covenant. We need more commitment to each other. The covenant is an invitation for all of us to give and take. It promotes relationship building. This is a discernment time. We trust our leadership to guide us in our discussion time this year.

Erin Dye (Table 25) – Their table group discussed a question: What if you choose to not sign? Someone made an analogy to inactive members in a congregation. The group affirmed the expectations in the covenant. They especially appreciate the way this covenant is working to provide financial stability for the Conference.

Paula Snyder Belousek (Table 19) – Her table group affirms this document. They were wondering if we will know who has signed the document and who has not.

Keith Hostetler (Table 11) – Some in his group felt that we have talked about this too long; it’s time to move on and do mission together. There was an affirmation of this direction. There was the acknowledgement that without the two-tier membership options, signing this document would be a weightier decision.

Justin Guenther (Table 5) – They gave a strong affirmation for committing to one another. They would like to discuss the underlying issue and feel that what we have been doing so far is not really addressing it. They echo concerns about how they present this document to their congregations.

Cliff Brubaker (Table 10) – Regarding the language about de-emphasizing discussion of leaving: Does that refer to only the Conference or also to discussion in our congregations?

Nate Hand (Table 7) – They had general affirmation for this document. They noted that most people we want to engage with have already left the Conference. If this document can help people to stop “jumping ship” and staying to discuss matters, it seems like a good step forward.

Steve Schmid (Table 26) – Some at his table would like answers so that they could make decisions. Some like the emphasis on relational work to help build the Conference.

Scott Coulter (Table 4) – People in his group were going several different directions in relation to this document. Some had affirmation of making a covenant. Some felt a year is not long enough for the covenant period. Some asked, “What is the next thing we will fight about?”

Randy Carr (Table 15) – His group was divided, with some in support of the covenant idea. They talked about the fact that churches are lamenting losing members on the conservative side. Some would rather not stick with the Conference for another year while continuing to lose members.

Transitional Conference Leader George O’Reilly talked about the idea of signing versus not signing the Year of Covenant. There is significant meaning to both signing and not signing. The initial focus in this conversation will be on credentialed leaders. He would like to have these conversations within congregations. The Year of Covenant is focused on building relational capacity. We may decide that re-covenanting regularly would be a good practice. The Year of Covenant is less about settling hot-button issues. Signup forms for the Year of Covenant will be on delegate tables tomorrow. Leadership Team is comfortable with a flexible deadline for signing.

A24. Resolution Committee Presentation —Thomas Dunn said that the Resolution Committee is making preparations to present a resolution which has been submitted to them. While waiting for the Resolution Committee to be ready to present the resolution, delegates sang two songs: “Where charity and love prevail” and “Come, let us all unite to sing.”

Thomas Dunn said that Resolutions Committee was seeking feedback from delegates on a proposed resolution which it had received. The Committee proposed taking a straw poll on the following statement: Realizing that there will be a process, Ohio Conference should withdraw from Mennonite Church USA. — Yes or No

The Resolutions Committee recommended that if 50 percent or more of delegates respond “yes,” they would advise the Leadership Team to call a special delegate session within the next four months to vote on this issue.

Time was given for clarifying questions. Paula Snyder Belousek asked what this straw poll does to the covenant process. Thomas Dunn replied that the poll would give some indication about how much support there is for the covenant and other documents. He also assured delegates that the results of the straw poll would be shared with delegates.

There was a call for a moment of silence and prayer.

Matt Hochstetler, who is serving as parliamentarian for this Annual Conference Assembly, said that this question has all the hallmarks of a main motion, and he would like to take time to make sure that it complies with Ohio Conference's guidelines for making resolutions. One of the criteria for resolutions is that no proposed resolution shall conflict or be in disagreement with the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995)*. (See pages 12-13 of the Annual Report Book for guidelines on bringing resolutions to the assembly.)

The question was tabled for the evening. Thomas Dunn asked the delegates to bear with the Leadership Team as they consult with the parliamentarian to make sure that they follow proper procedures.

A25. **Prayer** — Doug Zehr closed the business session with a prayer.

7-8 a.m. — Ohio Mennonite Women's Breakfast/Mennonite Men's Breakfast

8:10-8:25 a.m. — Prayer time

8:30-10 a.m. — Business Session #3

A26. **Opening Song** — Melissa Valentine led delegates in the song "To God be the glory."

A27. **Vote Regarding Membership in Mennonite Church USA** — Assistant Moderator Thomas Dunn reported that a study of *Robert's Rules of Order* revealed that a straw poll is not an appropriate delegate action according to *Robert's Rules of Order*. Therefore, the item tabled at the last delegate session needs to be dealt with as a formal motion.

Thomas Dunn stated that the Leadership Team previously had decided that all resolutions need to be approved by at least two-thirds of delegates (66.66 percent or more) to be adopted.

Parliamentarian Matt Hochstetler noted that according to the process outlined in the annual report, the Leadership Team can waive any portion of the rule regarding presenting resolutions to the Resolutions Committee. (See page 14 of the annual report book.)

Resolution: Ohio Conference should undertake a process to consider withdrawal from Mennonite Church USA.

Motion — Leadership Team / Second — Eldon King

Delegates were given the chance to ask any questions they had about the resolution. These questions and the Leadership Team's answers are listed below:

Q: Would the Statement Regarding Staying with MC USA be changed if delegates vote "no" on the current resolution?

A: No, it would not be changed.

Q: Are delegates able to abstain from this vote?

A: To abstain from this vote, delegates should write "abstain" on their ballots. Those abstaining would not be counted in the percentages.

Q: So a "yes" vote would be going against the Statement Regarding Staying with MC USA?

A: A "yes" vote could potentially change that statement, but not until later in the process.

Q: Would Leadership Team still ask for congregations to enter Year of Covenant if delegates vote "yes"?

A: Leadership Team will need to process that question.

Q: Could delegates caucus with their congregations, since some have not processed this question as a congregation?

Q: Why are we asking this question? This is a matter of how we deal with sexual sin.

Haroldo Nunes gave a word of appreciation for all the work of the Leadership Team.

The delegates took a few minutes to caucus in congregational groups, including a time of prayer.

Delegates voted on this resolution by paper ballot. The results were as follows: No — 139 (70 percent), Yes — 58 (30 percent), Abstain — 5. The resolution did not pass.

A28. Attendance Figures Announced — George O'Reilly reported attendance figures for this assembly. There are 276 attendees, including 210 delegates from 54 congregations. Yesterday's offering was \$7,074.

A29. Missional Story —Randy Carr, pastor at Beaverdam Mennonite Church, talked about the Firewood Gap Ministry which his congregation has done in conjunction with Love INC. What we do for the least of these really matters. Lots of people in the area use firewood to heat their homes, and some need assistance to have enough firewood. An Ohio Conference grant bought the tarp used to cover the firewood.

A30. Resource Advocate —Lois Bontrager, Ohio Conference Resource Advocate, reported on attending Resource Advocate training in February. She came away with the realization that we have many resources available. Mennonite Education Agency offers a free Sunday school curriculum. MennoMedia has many new items, including *Overplayed*, a book about youth sports; the newest vacation Bible school

curriculum, *Surprise; Trouble I've Seen*, a book by Drew Hart; the *Abundant Faith* women's bible study series; and a new commentary on I and II Chronicles. In addition, MennoMedia now has resource sample kits which churches can examine for free for 60 days. They can choose which, if any, of the resources they would like to purchase. The cost of the entire kit is \$60.

A31. Membership Resolution Discussion and Reporting —The delegates discussed the proposed resolution to offer congregations two types of membership. Under this proposal, congregations could either be members of Ohio Conference and Mennonite Church USA, or members of Ohio Conference only.

Motion: A motion to adopt the following resolution was made: In lieu of this less-than-desirable result, it is proposed that the Ohio Conference constitution be amended to create two distinct forms of membership within Ohio Conference. Both forms of membership would be equal in all facets of internal conference workings.

Motion – Leadership Team, Matt Williams – second

Open mic —

Joe Ladd (Table 6) – Questions came up about the funding of the two types of memberships. Maybe funding should be separated at the congregational level, rather than through the Conference.

Jess Engle (Table 3) – His table group affirms the Leadership Team's efforts to keep Conference together and keep relationships going. We have made allowances for our conservative brothers and sisters; are we making similar allowances for brothers and sisters on the other side? We still need to learn to deal with people who are different from us.

Shawn Hilliard (Table 7) – He affirms the desire to keep unity. He is concerned about 10 years down the road. Will we still be united?

Erin Dye (Table 5) — Several were affirming trying to stay together. They spent time clarifying the funding streams.

Herb Hershberger (Table 15) – Some negatives would be that there could be further splintering in the congregations; this action could be somewhat divisive. It seems like a temporary solution. On the positive side, this resolution might be good for polarized churches, bringing them together.

Justin Guenther (Table 5) – His group was generally supportive. He noted that as far as the resolution's wording goes, "necessary constitutional amendments" is not a very specific term. Will this resolution be meeting a need?

Steve Schmid (Table 26) – They liked trying to keep churches part of the Conference. There were concerns about tensions. How many will this help? Should there be a sunset for this resolution?

Paula Snyder Belousek (Table 19) – One congregation represented at her table group said that this resolution would be helpful for them. The others at the table would like to hear from other congregations who would find this resolution helpful.

Thomas Dunn – This resolution would be helpful for Crown Hill Mennonite Church. They are unsure about future ties to Mennonite Church USA but are very supportive of being part of Ohio Conference.

Grace Liechty – This resolution would help Oak Grove Mennonite Church (West Liberty). The congregation has lost several families to more conservative churches, and they think that having the option of belonging to Ohio Conference only might be helpful for them.

Matt Williams – South Union Mennonite Church would find this resolution helpful.

Tim Singenstreu led the delegates in prayer.

Delegates voted on the resolution by paper ballot. The results were as follows: Yes – 152 (80 percent), No – 39 (20 percent), Abstain – 6. The resolution was adopted.

A32. Introduction of Spending Plan — Ruth Kauffman of the Stewardship Ministry talked about the spending plan. The Stewardship Ministry heard delegate concerns from last year. This year the Conference has spent 125 percent of income year to date. The Stewardship Ministry is presenting a balanced budget. There are two material changes: First, there are staffing changes. Historically the Conference has had up to 5.5 full time equivalent (FTE) staff members. In the coming year there will be 3.25 FTE staff members, plus a flat consulting fee for the financial coordinator. Secondly, last year 10 percent of giving was forwarded to Mennonite Church USA. In the new spending plan, the denomination will receive 5 percent of the funds received from MC USA congregations, and nothing from congregations which choose not to remain a part of MC USA. The Stewardship Ministry is encouraging financial support directly to MC USA for those congregations who wish to support MC USA at a higher level.

Keith Hostetler, Stewardship Ministry Chair, noted that pass-through funds are not counted as part of the Ohio Conference spending plan. Ohio Conference-only congregations would not have any of their contributions sent on to MC USA. The amount budgeted for contributions to MC USA assumes that all congregations will remain part of MC USA, but if that is not the case, that line item in the spending plan would be adjusted downward.

Delegates took time to discuss the spending plan in their table groups.

The delegates were able to ask several questions:

Alan Kauffman (Table 13) – What is Ralph Reinford’s continuing role?

A: Ralph’s job is secure, and Leadership Team is looking for another pastoral candidate to work with Ralph. Funds are budgeted for 1.5 FTE for pastoral staff.

Scott Coulter (Table 4) – There was concern about employees losing benefits. What would be the next step if the budget would be rejected? He expressed appreciation for the Stewardship Team’s work.

Justin Guenther (Table 5) – His table group expressed affirmation for being presented a realistic budget. They would like to express affirmation for Judy King’s work.

Kevin Trent (Table 22) – He expressed affirmation for the work of the Stewardship Ministry and Keith Hostetler. They have had a very difficult challenge with reduced receipts.

Keith Hostetler noted that the Conference has used up its short-term operating reserve, and the amount available for grants will be reduced. The Year of Covenant will be asking congregations for a financial commitment so that they can address things like benefits and job security for staff. The Year of Covenant will require funds. Capacity Building Funds could be used to fund a position related to the Year of Covenant.

Motion — A motion was made to approve the 2016-17 spending plan for Ohio Conference as presented. Motion — Stewardship Ministry / second — Craig Strasbaugh

Myron Weaver led the delegates in prayer prior to the vote.

Delegates voted on this spending plan by paper ballot. The results were as follow: Yes — 144 (97 percent), No — 5 (3 percent), Abstain — 1. The spending plan was approved.

A33. **Announcements** – David Elkins made several announcements regarding workshops, delegate checklists, nomination forms and evaluation forms.

10-10:45 a.m. —Break/Displays/Snacks

10:45-11:45 a.m. — Workshops/Displays

11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m. — Lunch

12:45-2 p.m. — Worship #2

2:15-3 p.m. — Business Session #4

A34. **Credentialing Ministry Report** – Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, made a correction to her written report: The Credentialing Ministry reactivated the license for ministry for Linda Short. Credentialing Ministry team members introduced themselves. Credentialing Ministry work involves times of joy, but also sadness and struggle. They have withdrawn the credentials of those whose congregations have left the Conference. Sometimes the team also has to discipline credentialed persons. They are not perfect at this, but they seek God, and do their best.

A35. **Ministry Development Team Report** — Thomas Dunn reported on the work of the Ministry Development Team. This group had a lot of turnover in this past year, so their first meetings were taken

up with learning their tasks. Thomas gave special recognition to three Ministry Development Team members who have worked on the Year of Mission. They are Jacob Dodson, Kevin Kanagy, and Jason Rissler. Thomas also expressed appreciation for staff members who have worked on the Year of Mission, including Judy King, Ann Leaman, and Alysa Short.

A36. Year of Covenant — It was announced that congregations can sign the Year of Covenant document at ACA, or they can take it home to sign later. A copy will be available on the Conference website.

A37. Open Mic Time —

Jan Sohar (Table 11) — He expressed his thanks to Thomas Dunn for filling in for the moderator.

Thomas Dunn — He expressed thanks for all who have been praying for this weekend.

Judy King — She expressed appreciation for all the work and prayer of the Leadership Team through a hard year.

Delegates gave a round of applause for the Leadership Team.

Ned Wyse (Table 14) — He noted that he had interviewed Rachel Kreider at Greencroft. In regard to the Conference's current struggles, she said, "Your grandchildren will ask, 'What was all the fuss about?'" He quoted a Robert Frost poem titled "What Fifty Said."

A38. Resolution of Appreciation — Dan Hooley, representing the Resolutions Committee, proposed that delegates approve the following resolution of appreciation:

Resolution — We join together to express our appreciation for the gracious hosting of the Central Mennonite Church in so many ways, from the parking lot to the pulpit, from the kitchen to the classrooms. Additionally, we recognize the contributions of many from other nearby congregations, and to them we give thanks. Furthermore, we acknowledge the service and sacrifice of the leadership persons of our conference: Leadership Team, Ministry Team members, staff and volunteers, and to them, we give thanks.

Motion — There was a motion to adopt this resolution. **Motion** — Leadership Team, Second — Anita Stoner. The motion was approved.

A39. Introduction of New Moderator — Thomas Dunn introduced the incoming moderator, Bob Sauder. Bob is a retired teacher and self-employed carpenter, as well as a volunteer at Sauder Village. Jeff Kauffman led in a prayer for Bob.

A40. Drawing for Delegate Incentives — There was a drawing for gift baskets for delegates who had completed the delegate checklist. Winners included Kristin White of Chestnut Ridge Mennonite, Matthew Williams of South Union Mennonite, Herb Hershberger of Oak Grove Mennonite (Smithville) and Sandy Roth of Beech Mennonite.

A41. **Final Announcements** – David Elkins made some final announcements to delegates. DVDs of the Missions Conference and Annual Conference Assembly will be available for a fee. Those interested should call the Conference office.

A42. **Planning Committee Appreciation** – Delegates gave a round of applause for the planning committee of this Annual Conference Assembly.

A43. **Closing Song** – George O'Reilly led delegates in singing "Where charity and love prevail."

Recorded by Ann Leaman

Statement on Remaining with MC USA

The Ohio Conference Leadership Team has come to the decision that Ohio Conference will remain a part of MC USA so that we can continue to give counsel to and receive counsel from the denomination.

This does not preclude challenging one another, and in fact demands it. As scriptures demonstrate at the Jerusalem Council in Acts, there are appropriate times to openly confront each other on disagreements. Ohio Conference is choosing to remain a part of MC USA in order to articulate to the denomination our perceptions of differences in doctrine and practice. Certainly we all know a primary presenting issue of disagreement relates to issues with regard to the LGBTQ community, but other issues include the understanding of the Gospel, and issues of biblical interpretation. Ohio Conference does not presume to have all the answers and does not want to appear self-righteous. We invite MC USA (any and all entities that make up the denomination) to examine us, critique us, admonish us and hold us accountable.

With this decision to remain we also wish to convey some boundaries around events which would trigger a discernment process of Ohio Conference to leave MC USA:

- substantive changes to the 1995 Confession of Faith
- substantive change to the Membership Guidelines
- any denominational requirement that Ohio Conference recognize the credentials of individuals licensed or ordained in other conferences

Even while retaining our connection with MC USA, concerns expressed from within Ohio Conference, prompt us to communicate that:

- We will encourage member congregations to attend MEA institutions that teach and practice what we believe as interpreted by the Confession of Faith
- We will encourage all member congregations to carefully and prayerfully ensure that all teaching materials used in our churches agree with our understanding of the scriptures as interpreted by the Confession of Faith
- We will encourage congregations to direct funds towards aspects of the denomination with which we are in agreement as interpreted by the Confession of Faith

In order for Ohio Conference to substantively engage in communication with MC USA we will be:

- Asking that Ohio Conference be represented on denominational boards
- Using the opportunities available to articulate our differences clearly at CLC