

Minutes of the 48th Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)
Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
Central Christian School, Kidron, Ohio
March 24-25, 2017

Theme — Who is my Neighbor?

Friday, March 24

5:30 p.m. — Pastor Appreciation Meal

7:30 p.m. — Opening Worship

Saturday, March 25

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 #1

A1. Call to Order and Welcome — Moderator Bob Sauder welcomed delegates to Annual Conference Assembly and called the meeting to order.

A2. Prayer — Retired pastor Dan King led the assembly in an opening prayer.

A3. Opening Song — Marilyn Rossiter led the delegates in an opening song, "Healer of our every ill."

A4. Minutes of the 2016 Assembly — Moderator Bob Sauder invited delegates to accept the minutes of the 2016 Annual Conference Assembly.

There was a motion to accept the minutes of the 2016 Annual Conference Assembly. M/S/C

A5. Table Group Introductions — Delegates took time to introduce themselves to the others in their table groups.

A6. Introduction of Conference Visitors — Moderator Bob Sauder introduced Conference visitors.

A7. Introduction and Blessing of New Pastors — Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Cliff Brubaker introduced pastors with new assignments in the Ohio Conference: Sean Swanson, First Mennonite (Canton); Matt Weaver, Lockport Mennonite; Emily Hedrick, Lima Mennonite; and transitional pastors, Jayne Byler, Beech Mennonite; Walt Morton, Midway, Kidron and Maple Grove (Hartville); Dan Hooley,

Friendship Mennonite; and Howard Horton, Gilead Mennonite. Cliff Brubaker gave a prayer of blessing for these individuals.

A8. Release of Congregations and Lament — Seven congregations have chosen to leave the Ohio Conference during the past Conference year: Beaverdam Mennonite Church, First Mennonite Church (Berne, Indiana), Hillside Chapel, North Lima Mennonite Church, Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Smithville Mennonite Church, and Victory Community Church. Todd Martin, pastor of Smithville Mennonite Church, gave a brief statement about the congregation's process in deciding to leave the Conference. In response, Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford apologized for any hurt the congregation experienced, and asked God's blessing on the Smithville congregation. The regional pastors led the delegates in a litany of lament and blessing for the seven congregations. Ralph Reinford closed this time of lament with prayer.

A9. Year of Covenant Report — Cliff Brubaker reported on the Year of Covenant process. Congregations were invited to participate in a Year of Covenant at the beginning of this Conference year. At that time, George O'Reilly was serving as Year of Covenant Facilitator, but he later left the Conference for another pastoral position, and Cliff was asked to direct this effort.

There were three meetings for pastors over the year. The goals were to help think about ways of practicing right relationships and ways to be a discerning body, as well as implementing the Year of Mission. David Boshart, executive conference minister of Central Plains Mennonite Conference, was the speaker for the first pastor meeting in May at Sharon Mennonite Church. David Miller of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary was the speaker for the second pastors' meeting.

At the third Year of Covenant Meeting, which was held in Toledo, pastors identified things which helped to build trust and those things which had been detrimental to trust. One document they looked at was adopted by Ohio Conference delegates in 1998. The document, titled "Procedures for Responding to Tension-Producing Differences within Ohio Conference," was developed by a group called the Theological Resource Committee. Ernest Martin was the committee's chair. Cliff said that this document may need some revision, but it can be useful as we go forward together as a Conference. He ended his report by saying that the pastors have laid the groundwork on a commitment to work together.

A10. Year of Mission Reflections — Jacob Dodson, a member of the Mission Resource Team, introduced the members of the resource team: Jason Rissler, Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, Alysa Short, Shawn Hilliard and Rick Stoner. He discussed the rationale for having a Year of Mission. Mission is integral to our future. The team felt the need for practical tools and training and building relationships. The Year of Mission began with a missional training conference with Brad Brisco and Lance Ford just prior to the 2016 ACA. This year ACA was preceded by the missional event with Alan and Debra Hirsch. Other events included fall and spring missional gatherings which included times for congregational sharing. Podcasts by Bill Seymour and Thomas Dunn helped to tell missional stories, and the Ministry Development Team gave eight grants totaling \$21,614, which helped congregations in mission endeavors.

A11. Table Discussion — Delegates discussed two questions: How has your understanding of mission changed during this past year? What are you doing about it?

A12. **Worship** — Bob Sauder introduced Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg. Jessica encouraged delegates to share stories of mission. She talked about the theme scripture for ACA, Luke 10:25-37, which is the parable of the Good Samaritan. She talked about her experience as a member of a group of young adult leaders who had been asked to present a paper at the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC). When presenting this paper to the CLC, she used shards of broken pottery as a visual symbol. She reminded delegates of the denominational vision statement, “Vision: Healing and Hope.” She asked if we have lived into this vision. She invited everyone to take a shard of pottery. She asked delegates to hold their pieces and to think about their imperatives. Because we hold these things so tightly, they hurt us and they hurt others. Jesus wants all of us, all the broken shards. Delegates were invited to hold their pieces, and then lay them down during communion later in the day.

A13. **Table Discussion** — Delegates discussed several questions: What is your “yeah, but” response to Jesus? How might your one piece be misunderstood by the watching world? What are those things we need to give up to each other?

Open Mic —

Justin Guenther (Table 9) — We have ideas about how things are supposed to be. Christianity is about surrender, transformation, dying to self.

David Eshleman — We have not done a good job of implementing the five-fold ministry described in Ephesians 4:11. The ways we are doing things will have to shift. We all are ministers of the gospel. Persecution will either make or break us. We need to have the vision that God will fill his church.

Evan Wehr (Table 5) — His group’s consensus is that a lot of churches are going through transitions. It’s easy to get distracted by church issues.

A14. **Announcements** — Bob Sauder announced that there were 15 first-time delegates attending ACA. He also made several other announcements.

10-10:30 a.m. — **Break/Displays/Snacks**

10:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. — **Business Session #2**

A15. **Opening Song** — Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in two opening songs, “Jesus loves me” and “If all you want, Lord.”

A16. **Prayer** — Former Conference Moderator John Rohrer, a member of Sharon Mennonite Church, led delegates in prayer.

A17. **Announcements** — Bob Sauder announced several statistics from the Friday night worship service. There were 217 people in attendance representing 46 congregations. The offering totaled \$2,425.25.

A18. **The Voice** — Assistant Moderator Thomas introduced Bill Seymour and Darrin Snyder Belousek. Along with Erin Dye, they are serving on an advisory group known as The Voice. Bill described The Voice as an advisory group which is interacting with Mennonite Church USA. Darrin noted that the Leadership

Team appointed this team to facilitate relationships between Ohio Conference (and its individual congregations) and Mennonite Church USA and its agencies. The Voice is not intended to act as a go-between for congregations and Ohio Conference leadership. Congregations should address Ohio Conference leadership directly, rather than through The Voice.

This task force has been asked to act on behalf of Ohio Conference and its congregations. They receive questions and concerns from congregations and follow up by making inquiries with Mennonite Church USA and its agencies. They have been in contact with MennoMedia, Mennonite Education Agency, colleges, universities and seminaries. Those contacts have focused on content in Sunday school curriculum and teaching positions of educational institutions.

The task force is considering how to share results of its work with the rest of Ohio Conference. The task force also is being asked to represent the distinctive voice of the Ohio Conference in denominational processes. Members of The Voice will have the chance to fulfill this function at the denominational convention in Orlando by serving as delegates for Ohio Conference. They would invite delegates to contact them with questions and concerns.

A18. Listening Report — Cliff Brubaker noted that he had talked to Ernest Martin during the break about the document he mentioned earlier, “Procedures for Responding to Tension-Producing Differences within Ohio Conference.” Ernest emphasized that he was just a part of the group which created this document, not its sole author. He also noted we have a history of commitment to accountability between congregations.

Cliff Brubaker has spent time during the past several months meeting with leadership groups of most Ohio Conference congregations. He noted that his listening report has taken several forms. A shortened form was distributed at delegate gatherings in February and March. The longer version of the document was sent to delegates by email. The Leadership Team asked Cliff to share several “take-away” observations from the listening process. He has several take-away questions:

- What core commitments can we make together that will allow us to reach toward each other in consistently trustful ways? What does it mean to commit to walk together?
- Regarding continued affiliation with Mennonite Church USA: Can we find a place in the middle of the conversation through which we can be a conference of congregations together?
- Will we choose to make our affiliations, along with resolving the same-sex marriage questions, functionally the center of who we are as a conference, or will we choose to find a center around which we can join together in mission?”
- Is Conference a “them” or an “us”? The opportunity to talk with Conference representatives is of great importance.
- Are we willing to choose to build patterns of relationships between congregations and with Conference in which we willingly practice accountability with each other?
- What resources would help us to work at accountability?

- How can we talk peacefully and respectfully with each other when we work at hard issues together? Should we train people in the Conference who can help us have these kinds of conversations?
- In light of reduced staffing levels, how can we best provide support for pastors and help in pastoral searches?
- Can we shift the way we think about communication to meet the needs of another generation?
- Can we find alternate ways of decision-making so that our time together at ACA can focus on worship and storytelling?
- Should we free up staff time in order to make these types of listening sessions with congregational leadership groups possible on a regular basis?

A19. **Gathered and Sent** – Cliff Brubaker reported about the Gathered and Sent initiative. Considering what has been accomplished with the Year of Covenant and the Year of Mission, the Leadership Team began asking how these two initiatives could be merged together going forward. Cliff will be coordinating this work. Activities will be planned by two separate groups, but coordinated together.

Several goals for Gathered and Sent have been identified:

- To grow discipleship in congregations and missional engagement
- To empower and inspire congregations in mission
- To identify and engage in spiritual and relational practices
- To identify core values and the practices that could sustain us together
- To study issues together
- To learn skills for dealing with difficult conversations

A20. **Leadership Team Statement** — Bob Sauder introduced the Leadership Team statement about moving forward together as a Conference. The Leadership Team has listened to the congregations, and they acknowledge that some of us would like to see us separate from the denomination, while others of us definitely want to stay with the denomination, no matter what. The Leadership Team proposed the following statement:

Setting Direction for the Next Chapter of the Ohio Conference

As we prayerfully consider God’s leading into the future, we commit ourselves to the following:

We will continue our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA.

- **Three changes *could trigger a review of that affiliation:**
 - **A substantive change in the Confession of Faith;**
 - **A substantive change in the membership guidelines of MC USA;**
 - **A change in policy or practice at the national level that would require Ohio Conference to recognize the credentials of pastors who have performed same-sex marriages or who are involved themselves in a same-sex relationship.**

- **We will continue to utilize the Voice Task Force to speak into denominational processes and to agencies affiliated with MC USA**

We will put our best energy into being and becoming missional congregations together.

- **We will join the Year of Mission and Year of Covenant initiatives into a single initiative: *Gathered and Sent*.**
- **We will minimize the effort spent on the same-sex marriage issue.**

*Note: The wording of this line was changed before the delegates voted.

Bob Sauder noted that the delegates would discuss both this proposed statement and the proposed budget after a presentation by the Stewardship Ministry.

A21. Budget Presentation — Melanie Miller, Ruth Kauffman, Matt Hochstetler and Dean Falb are members of the Stewardship Ministry. They all came to the podium to visually represent that they have been working as a team.

Melanie Miller said the Stewardship Ministry is recommending that the spending restriction resolution which was adopted in 2015 at Annual Conference Assembly be rescinded. She also noted that at the end of February, which is 11 months into the current fiscal year, the Conference had a \$9,302 operating surplus. This is the first time in three years the Conference has not been running a deficit for the fiscal year. Can this trend continue?

Over the years, the Conference has accumulated \$736,091, most of which is invested in marketable securities (capital funds). However, because of a decrease in giving, the current operating fund (cash and savings) contains less than one month of operating funds. The Stewardship Ministry is presenting two proposed budgets. Delegates are being asked to choose between either a healthy budget or a barebones budget. Delegates will choose how Conference will move forward.

Moderator Bob Sauder talked about the implications of choosing between the barebones budget and the healthy budget. Staff time would be reduced if the barebones budget is chosen.

A22. Table Discussion — Delegates discussed the Leadership Team direction statement and the two budget options in their table groups.

A23. Open Mic Time

Herb Hershberger (Oak Grove) — Are any of the capital funds restricted?

Answer – One fund has restrictions. Some funds have loose recommendations on how they can be used.

Question (Name not given) — What is the increase in the salaries and wages in the healthy budget?

Answer —That money would be funding for a half-time conference leader.

Karla Kauffman – What is the chance of studying and sharing stories about the same-sex marriage issue?

Thomas Dunn (for Leadership Team) – We will focus our energies on “Gathered and Sent,” and being missional.

Mel Wenger (Orrville) – Why shouldn’t we protect the capital reserves and keep the 2015 budget directive?

Keith Hostetler – We now don’t have enough of the short-term surplus left to draw from in order to follow the 2015 budget directive.

Jayne Byler (Table 13) — What is the time frame for rescinding this budget directive? Is this permanent, or for a limited number of years?

Answer —There was not a time limit on the original resolution, and likewise there is no time limit on this proposal to rescind that resolution.

Matt Weaver (Table 19) – He noted that at his congregation, Lockport Mennonite, they had had conversations about the Leadership Team statement, and there were concerns about the wording of the first bullet point, which says, “**could** trigger a review of that affiliation.” The resolution passed in 2016 used the language “**would** trigger a discernment process.” Why did that wording change? Also, regarding the budget proposal, he would like to know what we are looking for a conference executive to do. What will a conference executive provide us with?

Bob Sauder — Regarding a conference executive, the Leadership Team is seeking an individual with missional gifts and instigator gifts. In other words, they are looking for someone to get us moving as a conference. This person also would handle the executive functions for the Conference.

Cliff Brubaker — Previous versions of the Leadership Team statement did have the word “would” instead of “could.” Cliff said that he had changed that wording, and he encouraged the delegate assembly to change the wording back to how it was originally.

Bill Seymour made a motion to amend the wording of the Leadership Team statement, replacing the word “could” in the first bullet point with “would.” The Leadership Team unanimously agreed to accept this motion, and it was seconded by Steve Heatwole. – Motion approved.

Bill Seymour – Regarding the proposal to rescind the 2015 budget resolution, he noted that dropping the requirement that the Conference spend no more than 135 percent of income would allow us to work at calling a conference executive without worrying about whether we will have to cut staff members’ hours partway through the year if giving is not strong enough.

Shawn Hilliard (Martins Mennonite) – This process seems schizophrenic. Why are these issues being considered together? What process would be begun by these “triggers” mentioned in the Leadership Team statement? How wise is it to focus on the Confession of Faith as a trigger? Does this way of moving forward set us up for long-term sustainability, or will we have to come back to this conversation again about whether we are in or out of the denomination? He made an analogy between this situation and a marriage covenant.

Bob Sauder — The Leadership Team wants to focus on our new way of doing business with “Gathered and Sent.” He noted that setting direction for the Conference and the budget seemed to be intimately tied together.

Walt Morton (Table 4) — In response to a previous comment regarding a marriage covenant: The marriage covenant works with two different people and the language that has previously bound them together in that covenant.

Melanie Miller – From a cash management perspective, we have less than one month of operating funds available. It seems unwise to “take the ship down” because of a lack of current giving when there is about \$500,000 in reserve funds. The Stewardship Ministry feels that it is best to give delegates a choice between the two budget plans.

Ruth Kauffman – Continuously drawing from capital funds is not sustainable; delegates need to talk to their congregations about what level of giving to Ohio Conference they can commit to.

Bob Sauder — In their presentation the Stewardship Ministry Team had mentioned congregational love offerings for the Conference. If your congregation would like to take that type of offering, someone from the Conference would be willing to visit the congregation to talk about it.

Even Wehr (Table 5) – He has several questions: Who decides what is a substantive change? How do we define same-sex relationships in regard to transgender individuals? He would like to have it stated who gets to decide these issues.

Bob Sauder – In all its discussions, the Leadership Team has agreed that substantive change is not just a small wording change, but a more major change.

Cliff Brubaker – He has been hearing consistently from the Leadership Team that they want to focus on the center of what we believe and what we want to work at.

A24. **Caucus** —Delegates were given time to caucus with other delegates from their congregation.

A25. **Prayer** — Ernest Martin led the delegates in prayer prior to the voting process.

A26. **Leadership Team Statement** —Delegates voted on the following resolution proposed by the Leadership Team:

Setting Direction for the Next Chapter of the Ohio Conference

As we prayerfully consider God’s leading into the future, we commit ourselves to the following:

We will continue our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA.

- **Three changes would trigger a review of that affiliation:**
 - **A substantive change in the Confession of Faith;**
 - **A substantive change in the membership guidelines of MC USA;**

- A change in policy or practice at the national level that would require Ohio Conference to recognize the credentials of pastors who have performed same-sex marriages or who are involved themselves in a same-sex relationship.
- We will continue to utilize the Voice Task Force to speak into denominational processes and to agencies affiliated with MC USA.

We will put our best energy into being and becoming missional congregations together.

- We will join the Year of Mission and Year of Covenant initiatives into a single initiative: *Gathered and Sent*.
- We will minimize the effort spent on the same-sex marriage issue.

Delegates voted on the resolution by paper ballot. The results were as follows: 154 — affirm (93 percent), 11 — did not affirm. The resolution was adopted.

A26. Rescinding 2015 Spending Resolution —The Leadership Team and Stewardship Ministry jointly recommended that the spending restriction resolution that was adopted at the 2015 ACA be rescinded.

The spending resolution adopted at the 2015 ACA reads as follows:

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 the 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: That we rescind the spending resolution which was adopted at the 2015 Annual Conference Assembly. Motion and second by Leadership Team and Stewardship Ministry. Delegates voted on the motion by paper ballot. The results were as follows: 160 — approve (97 percent), 5 —did not approve. The motion was approved.

A27. Budget Proposals —The Stewardship Ministry presented the delegates with two budgets, the “healthy” budget and the “barebones” budget. Delegates were asked to choose which budget they would affirm.

The delegates voted on the proposed budgets by paper ballot. The results were as follows: barebones budget – 4, healthy budget —159 (98 percent). The healthy budget was approved.

A28. Announcements — Judy King made several announcements regarding lunch.

12:15-1:15 — Lunch

1:15-3:15 p.m. — Business Session #3

A29. Opening Song — Marilyn Rossiter, Alex Dye and Emily Hedrick led delegates in an opening song, “Santo, santo, santo.”

A30. **Prayer** — David Tijerina, a retired pastor from Good Shepherd Mennonite Church, led delegates in prayer.

A31. **Announcements** — Bob Sauder repeated announcements about returning items to the registration table. He thanked staff members Judy King and Alysa Short for all their work in preparing for this assembly.

A32. **Results of Voting Announced** —Bob Sauder reported the results of the votes taken at the end of Business Session #2 (see above).

A33. **Gifts Discernment Slate and Vote** —Mel Hathaway, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, introduced the slate of nominees for 2017-18. He noted that delegates should add the name of Steve Schmid of Wooster Mennonite Church, who has agreed to serve as the Worship Focus Leader on the Ministry Development Team. Mel affirmed all the people who have been serving on these ministry teams. After a prayer, delegates were asked to mark their Gifts Discernment ballots. Members of the Gifts Discernment Ministry collected the ballots.

A34. **Worship Resourcing Seminar** – Mel Hathaway told delegates about the Worship Resourcing Seminar which Sonnenberg Mennonite Church and Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville are co-sponsoring. It will take place May 6 at Sonnenberg.

A35. **Ministry Development Team Report** — Thomas Dunn, who serves as chair for the Ministry Development Team (MDT), referred to the printed MDT report found in the annual report book. He also reported on the grants which the MDT awarded in 2016.

A36. **Credentialing Ministry** — Dan Hooley, acting chair of the Credentialing Ministry, referred to the tribute to Naomi Engle which was printed in the annual report book. Prior to being diagnosed with cancer, Naomi had served as chair of the Credentialing Ministry. Dan had everyone pause briefly for a time of reflection and thanks for the life of Naomi. Dan introduced the members of the Credentialing Ministry, and he affirmed the work of the regional pastors. He referred to the Credentialing Ministry report on pages 35-36 of the annual report book. He noted one addition to the report: the Credentialing Ministry granted the ordination of Jeff Hochstetler at Berlin Mennonite.

He listed several examples of the ways the Credentialing Ministry works. The Credentialing Ministry is working to educate pastors about the denomination's recent revision of the ministerial sexual misconduct policy. This document is located on the Mennonite Church USA website. The Credentialing Ministry is committed to taking complaints of ministerial misconduct seriously. The Credentialing Ministry also arranges mentoring for new pastors. He acknowledged and thanked those mentors.

A37. **Podcast report** —During the past several months Thomas Dunn and Bill Seymour have been recording podcasts telling Ohio Conference stories and dealing with Ohio Conference issues. They spoke briefly about the podcasts and gave thanks to Norm Sohar, their audio technician, and Conference Editor Ann Leaman, who is responsible for putting the podcast on the website and iTunes. They also

introduced Lucas Johnson, a delegate from Valley View Mennonite Church in Spartansburg, Pennsylvania, who expressed thanks for podcasts.

A38. Gifts Discernment Slate Results — Bob Sauder reported that 156 delegates cast ballots for the Gifts Discernment slate. One hundred fifty-two delegates affirmed the entire ballot, and four delegates gave partial affirmation. The ballot was affirmed.

A39. Delegate Incentive Drawings — There was a drawing for gift baskets for delegates who had completed the delegate checklist. Winners included Julia Beyeler and Daniel Jockey, who had completed part of the checklist, and Justin Guenther and Edna Troyer, who had completed the entire checklist.

A40. Pastor-Spouse Retreat — Jeff Hochstetler, member of the planning committee for the Pastor-Spouse Retreat, reported on plans for the 2017 retreat. This retreat happens once every two years, and it is designed as a time for reflection on marriage, as well as a time for rest and recreation. Guest speakers will be Jim Lapp and Miriam Book. Tim Shue will lead worship. The retreat will take place Nov. 10-12 at Mohican State Park Lodge. Consider giving this weekend as a gift to your pastor.

A41. Year of Mission: Looking Forward — Jacob Dodson, a member of the Mission Resource Team, referred delegates to a handout titled “Beyond the Year of Mission.” He mentioned several ongoing goals: We are committed to continuing to grow our culture of mission. We want to continue to provide practical training, and we want to increase our partnership together.

Jacob reviewed some of the information passed on during the past year. There are a variety of cultural barriers to mission. We need to find new ways that cross additional cultural barriers in order to do mission. As a conference we need to focus on missional practices. During the past year, five churches in Wayne County met together regularly with a missional coach. The Conference encourages other churches to consider meeting together for this kind of missional coaching. Mennonite Mission Network is offering missional discipleship groups.

A42. Mennonite Mission Network — Karla Minter works with Ohio Conference and two other conferences as a representative of Mennonite Mission Network (MMN). She reminded delegates of the mission statement of Ohio Conference: To be a people and congregations dedicated to the worship of, faith in and witness for Jesus Christ. Ohio Conference already is becoming a missional conference. She hears local stories of mission as she visits congregations. Nearly three-fourths of Ohio Conference congregations financially support MMN, making Ohio Conference the largest supporting conference in Mennonite Church USA. She thanked delegates for the generosity of the conference.

She shared several examples of mission efforts that Ohio Conference congregations support through MMN: Brian and Noelia Fox (Spain), Dennis and Connie Byler (Spain), Dariush and Emily Meraj (Turkey), the Oyanguren family (Chaco), Mongolia Mission Partnership, Dale and Bethsaba Nafziger (Nepal), Neal and Janie Blough (France), and Bruce Yoder and Nancy Frey (Burkina Faso).

She challenged Ohio Conference to be a missional people, and recommended focusing on scripture, prayer, and community. MMN has developed the Missional Discipleship Initiative, in which groups of

three people disciple one another, and they receive coaching. Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty has used this process.

A43. Mennonite Church USA — Terry Shue, director of leadership development for Mennonite Church USA, reported about the denomination. He noted that he has attended 28 Annual Conference Assemblies in a row. He affirmed the focus of the Ohio Conference Leadership Team. He talked about feeling the difficulty of this season and reminded delegates of the denominational vision statement: God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world. He said that his heart is both full and torn – full of all the good things going on, and torn with pain, realizing the challenges that face us. We grieve at the national level for those who are no longer with us.

Mennonite Church USA has more than 700 congregations and 18 conferences. Some of the things happening include church planters gathering at the SENT Conference, Hope for the Future, the MennoMedia song project, Everence’s work with pastors for debt reduction, the Values-Based Leadership Program, the system of pastoral call, the ministerial misconduct policy, and the Corinthian Plan.

He asked a question: Is the church almost dead, or is it almost ready to be reborn? God is doing something new. Other conferences also are struggling to find a new normal. We can look at the difficulty of being in church leadership today and decide it is time to quit, or we can hear the words from the book of Esther — maybe we have been called “for such a time as this.” During the Future Church Summit at the MC USA convention in Orlando, the church will gather to consider this question: What does it mean to be an Anabaptist follower of Jesus in the 21st century? He encouraged prayers for that event, and thanked delegates for support of Mennonite Church USA.

A44. Step Up Program Participants — Bob Sauder encouraged delegates to participate in the Future Church Summit. He also announced the names of three youth who will be participating in the Step Up Program at the denominational convention this summer. Step Up participants will be included in table groups during the July 6-8 Future Church Summit. Ohio Conference has tapped three youth to participate: Luke Wheeler, Lockport Mennonite; Tessa Waidelich, West Clinton Mennonite; and Madeline Kauffman, Berlin Mennonite.

A45. Table Discussion — Delegates spent a few minutes discussing the reports they had heard. An open mic time was offered after the discussion, but no comments were given.

A46. Communion — Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Cliff Brubaker led the delegates in a time of communion. Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg invited all delegates to lay down the pottery shards they received in the morning if they were ready to do so.

A47. Announcements — Bob Sauder closed the meeting with several announcements and thanked the delegates for their affirmation of the Leadership Team’s direction.

A48. Closing Song — Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in a closing song, “Praise God from whom.”