

Minutes of the 41st Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)
Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
Central Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio
March 12-13, 2010

Theme—A Venture in Discipleship

Friday, March 12, 1:30 p.m. — Business Session #1 (Fellowship Hall)

- A1. **Call to Order** – John Rohrer, moderator, called the meeting to order.
- A2. **Invocation** – Tom Kauffman, conference minister, led in an opening prayer.
- A3. **Opening Song** – Anita Roth, Central Mennonite, led in “God of grace and God of glory.”
- A4. **Moderator Opening Comments** – John Rohrer welcomed everyone to the 41st Annual Conference Assembly and thanked our hosting congregations and the planning committee. He gave a special welcome the young adult delegates and made some opening announcements. He introduced the theme and scripture (Matthew 8:23-27) for the weekend and covered the basic procedure for the delegate sessions.
- A5. **Introduce Resolutions Committee** – John Rohrer introduced the committee: Fran Mast (Martins Creek), Ann Leaman (Conference Editor, Beech), and Larry Augsburger (Kidron).
- A6. **Role Call of Congregations** – Tom Kauffman introduced the PowerPoint presentation featuring photos of each Conference congregation’s pastor and church building. Congregations were introduced based on their regions.
- A7. **Minutes of 2009 ACA** – John Rohrer directed delegates attention to the minutes printed in the report book, giving opportunity for questions or corrections. Minutes stand approved as submitted.
- A8. **Welcome of New Pastors** – Pastors beginning new assignments were welcomed and introduced to the delegate assembly.

Andy Stoner introduced Tim Schultz (Aurora), Rick Stoner (Bethel), Marvin Zuercher (Chestnut Ridge), David Falls (Grace Community), Steve Heatwole (Lockport), Doug Zehr (Oak Grove, Smithville), Jim Sutton (Peace), Gary and Sandy Stuckey (Pine Grove), Doug Luginbill (Salem, Elida), Mel Hathaway (Sonnenberg), Walt Morton (Toledo), Naomi and Jess Engle (West Clinton) and Cliff Brubaker (Zion).

Matt Hamsher introduced Tim Zuercher (Berlin) and Tim Singenstreu (Salem, Wooster).

Tom Kauffman introduced Jeff Linthicum, Jerry Flueckiger and Darren Kloepper (First, Berne).

Tom led in a prayer of blessing for these persons.

- A9. **Introduction of LifeBridge** — Matt Hamsher introduced Chet Miller-Eshleman and shared about the vision of LifeBridge, a church plant in the Dover, Ohio, area supported by Walnut Creek, Berlin and Martins Creek congregations. Chet shared his excitement about becoming part of Ohio Conference.

John allowed time for questions before the vote to receive the congregation as a member. The Leadership Team brings this recommendation, and the vote was taken by standing votes. Passed unanimously.

- A10. **Cluster arrangements** – Tom Kauffman shared a PowerPoint presentation, building on the conversation from cluster meetings. The Conference is considering ways to offer services to the congregations while working to

address regional pastor overload. Possibilities include reducing the travel, making more reports and documents available online, and reducing cluster meetings.

John gave five minutes for table groups to get acquainted with each other.

Tom outlined several questions about alternative cluster formats for discussion around tables and invited groups to record and turn in their feedback.

John gave opportunity for comments at the mic. Affirmation was given for video conferencing. A question was raised about the assumptions behind the questions; perhaps more regional pastors would be a better solution. Affirmation was given for face-to-face meetings with a staff person (or designated volunteer coordinator) but have presentations via video. There was affirmation for congregational leaders staying connected to Conference leadership. A suggestion was given to have a one-time information session and the second cluster be designated for feedback and discussion. Concern for clarity about the intent of cluster meetings was expressed; the intent of the meetings and that should then shape the format of the sessions.

- A.11 **Prayer Ministry** – Mattie Marie Mast, chair of the prayer ministry, shared about the prayer emphasis in the Conference and in the planning for ACA. She highlighted the *Prayer Prompter*, which was included in the registration packet, as well as the prayer opportunities and support offered during ACA.
- A.12. **Missional Story** – John Miller, pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite, shared about some of the challenges that the congregation has faced and about the steps the church has taken to revitalize. Pleasant View had a thank you meal for their local fire department as a way of connecting with the community. In partnership with the fire department they hosted a relief kit assembly evening, working to get to know people in the neighborhood. The congregation is also hoping to partner with other congregations to have a community garden.
- A.13. **Announcements** -- Dean Beck welcomed delegates on behalf from Central Mennonite Church. He made announcements about logistics for the conference.

3 p.m. — Poster Sessions/Displays and Snacks

3:45 p.m. — Business session #2 (Sanctuary)

- A.14. **Opening Song** – Anita Roth led in singing “My hope is built on nothing less.”
- A.15. **Ministry Development Team Report** – Ginny Cress, assistant moderator, explained that the Ministry Development Team does its work through Resource Teams. A PowerPoint presentation gave an overview of the Resource Team process and highlighted current team activities.
- Ginny invited delegate response, giving a few minutes for conversation and notes about Resource Team ideas.
- A.16. **Missional Story** —Naomi Engle, co-pastor of West Clinton, shared about the congregation’s “Fall Sports Sunday” through a DVD presentation.
- A.17. **Camp Luz** – Deb Horst, director, shared about the new vision for the ministry of the Camp: “Freely proclaiming the radical hope of Jesus Christ to the next generation.” This vision will guide the re-shaping of programming with specific tracks addressing spiritual formation in children and youth, and work to eliminate the barriers that keep children from coming to camp. She thanked the delegates for their financial support and requested ongoing prayer support.
- A.18. **Introduction of Gifts Discernment Slate** – Bruce Glick, chair, outlined the nominating and affirmation process. The ballot and the nominations form will be collected at conclusion of the morning business session.

John expressed appreciation for the work of Bruce Glick and the Gifts Discernment Committee.

- A19. **Missional Story** – Joel Miller, pastor of Cincinnati Mennonite, shared about the bi-monthly community meal their congregation hosts, serving 20-60 people each time. He also told the story of “Jan and Stan,” a homeless couple which the congregation journeyed with as Jan dealt with cancer. He shared of his experience of receiving hospitality from Jan as they supported her, and eventually leading in a celebration of her life for her family and friends after her death.
- A20. **History Book** – Celia Lehman, editor, and John Rohrer gave an update on the History Book project, reviewing the past 40 years of Ohio Conference history. The pre-publication price is \$8, and order forms were provided in the packets.
- A21. **Announcements** – John highlighted Ernest Martin’s book, *A Biblical Theology of Marriage*, available in the display area.

Noting the resolution brought by Mennonite Women to Columbus '09 about the issue of human trafficking, John shared an article from *The Columbus Dispatch*, encouraging this issue as a topic for a Resource Team.

Dean Beck highlighted the culled Resource Library books available to Conference participants as well as noting other logistical items.

4:45 p.m. —Workshops, Supper, Evening Worship, Display time and Young Adult Activities.

Saturday, March 13, 8:30 a.m. — Business session #3 (Fellowship Hall)

A22. **Opening Song** – Anita led in singing “All hail the power of Jesus’ name.”

- A23. **State of the Conference** – John reflected on the past six years, which has included the structural transition of the Conference. He was the first lay moderator to serve, receiving a basin and towel as a symbol of servant leadership. The mission statement, purpose statement and the key functions of the Conference were reviewed.

John spoke about staffing, affirming the current staff, noting the review process, and naming some concerns. He highlighted the importance of the volunteer support of Conference work, in particular with the adapted “open spaces” model through Resource Teams, and how the profession and volunteer staff work together and support each other.

Choice Books Ohio has become Choice Books Great Lakes, and John reported on the transition. He thanked Jan Sohar for his work as director, the Choice Book board members, the volunteers and employees who contributed to the mission over the life of this ministry and to those who assisted in the integration.

- A24. **Spending Plan** – John presented the proposed spending plan. In reviewing the past year, John noted that the individual contributions have enabled the Conference to meet expenses. The proposal is a balanced budget, with few changes and no salary increases given. Stewardship Team has the goal of operating expenses at 80percent of the budget, programming at 10 percent and denominational giving at 10 percent.

Time was given for discussion around tables. Open mic time was given for questions and response. A suggestion was made that any above-budget contributions be designated for the giving portion of the spending plan. There was a request for actual numbers to accompany the spending plan. There were a few questions for clarification, and it was suggested that the Conference consider alternative methods for disseminating the *Ohio Evangel* to save on printing costs.

Proposed: That the Spending Plan for April 2010 through March 2011 be adopted. Second.
No further questions/comments. Vote was taken by raised hands. Passed unanimously.

- A25. **Beck Foundation** — Tom gave a brief history of the \$5,000 award given to the Conference for stewardship education and the attempt Conference made to launch a pilot project. Conference staff, in conjunction with the Leadership Team, presented an alternative proposal for using the funds. A seminar series titled Church Renewal Institute was proposed, with the first emphasis being on the challenges that smaller congregations face.

Time was given for table groups to discuss specific questions in regards to the seminar outline. Written responses were requested from each table.

A26. **Denominational Reporting**

Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, shared the mission and vision statements of the denomination, and highlighting the four denominational priorities. He recognized Willis and Berdaline Horst, retired Argentine missionaries. He highlighted the newest book being released by Mennonite Publishing Network, *The Naked Anabaptist* by Stuart Murray. Mennonite Education Agency is working at leadership training programs.

Lois Bontrager, church relations manager for Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA), introduced MMA representatives in the group, and announced that Dave Miller will join the Mennonite Foundation staff in the fall. In response to the economic situation, MMA is using Nehemiah 2:20 as a guiding vision. She shared highlights of how MMA has partnered with congregations to provide aid and support. Mennonite Financial has become affiliated with MMA, and Lois gave a brief history and reviewed the services they offer. Referring to an issue of *Everyday Stewardship*, Lois shared about Jenna, a young woman who is part of the Oak Grove congregation in West Liberty.

Nancy Kauffmann, denominational minister, introduced a variety people connected to the denominational agencies: Amy Gingerich, Mennonite Publishing Network; Norma Duerksen, Conference Resource Advocate; Dean Heisey, Mennonite Mission Network ; Terry Shue, Executive Board member; Mattie Marie Mast, Network Board member; Bethany Shue Nussbaum, Mennonite Mission Network Development Associate; Tim Burkholder, Mennonite Education Agency; Mim Shirk, Mennonite Health Services Alliance; Lyle Troyer and Don Yoder, Mennonite Men; Jean Emery, Mennonite Women. Nancy provided forms for table group responses and feedback.

- A27. **Mission Story** —Matt Hamsher, regional pastor, introduced Nicole and Ina, full-time volunteers through Christliche Dienst (Mennonite Voluntary Service from Germany), who are serving at Agora's ministries in Columbus, Ohio. The current program ministers to 125 kids twice a week. Ina reflected on the impact of the ongoing work and development of the ministry which has hosted many volunteers. The daycare center is within a few days of receiving its license.

Matt also shared that one of the volunteers, Lukas, has been diagnosed with cancer. Matt offered a prayer.

- A28. **Conference Guests** – Tom introduced the representatives who brought displays to ACA.

- A29. **Central Christian Schools** – Gene Miller, head administrator, reflected on some of the blessings Central has experienced this year, thanking the Conference for the relationship and spiritual support.

Motion: to accept the directory of incorporated members. Second. A vote was taken by show of hands. Passed unanimously.

- A30. **Greetings from Bluffton University** — President James Harder brought greetings to the delegates. He expressed gratitude for the strengthening of ties between the university and the Conference, as well as thanks for the support from the constituency. The school has recently been reaccredited, has had an increased enrollment, and has had interest in their new mediation program. He invited delegates to attend the Beyond Borders Immigration Conference which will be hosted at the University in March.

- A31. **Announcements** – Mattie Marie Mast highlighted the Immigration Prayer Guide available online and book form available in the display area. Dean Beck reviewed a few logistical items.

10 a.m. — Poster Sessions/Displays with snacks, Worship, Lunch and Workshops

2:15 p.m. — Business session #4 (Fellowship Hall)

- A32. **Opening Song** – Anita Roth led in singing “Blessed Savior, we adore thee.”

- A33. **Peace & Justice Award** – Ginny Cress, assistant moderator, presented a peace mug to the Lee Heights congregation for their work in tutoring, adopting a school, distribution of the alternatives to military recruitment packets, extensive summer Bible school programming, hosting a peace club in a local high school, a hunger center, a senior citizen housing center, and an organized effort to reduce poverty. The mug, commissioned by Dick Lehman, was provided by the Peace & Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA.

- A34. **Ballots**—John called for ushers to collect the Gifts Discernment ballots.

- A35. **Executive Report** – Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, made some comments in regards to LaVern Yutzy’s recent alignment study which has 16 recommendations. Ervin invited comments from the constituents and committed to include all those impacted by the recommendations in the discussions about implementation.

Ervin invited questions at the microphone. He shared about LaVern’s credentials. He also invited Tom to reflect on how these recommendations may impact Ohio Conference. Tom highlighted the way in which Conference voice is communicated with executive level leadership would be a significant change.

Ervin shared that his goal in leadership is to help the denomination to focus on the vision that God has given, calling more people to discipleship, and finding ways to best organize to work together. He made some comments about the Joining Together campaign and the way that dispersed staff will continue to function.

- A36. **Announcement** —Tom noted that DVDs of both the worship and business sessions will be available. These may also be available on the Conference Web site at a future date.

- A37. **Hispanic initiative** – Tom briefly reviewed the Conference efforts with Hispanic ministries, noting the ongoing efforts of Brazo en Brazo in Lima, Open Arms in Wayne County, and LifeBridge’s ministry. He shared how the Conference understands their role in relationship with congregations to work at this ministry opportunity: specifically, to witness to Christ in ways that invite people to worshipping communities, to advocate for the marginalized, and to navigate the challenges of a new culture and community.

The question of having a Hispanic ministry “fact-finder” or “needs assessor” was presented to the delegates for table discussion. There was time given at the microphone where affirmation was expressed. There were some concerns including budgeting and intent and focus. It was suggested that consideration be given to network across the country. It was also highlighted that the efforts should come from engagement at the local level.

Motion: Conference should undertake to organize and explore to work with the various Hispanic ministries in Ohio. Second. A vote was taken by raising hands. Passed unanimously.

John said this task would be taken by the Leadership Team.

- A38. **Missional Story** – Mel Hathaway, pastor at Sonnenberg Mennonite, shared about a response their congregation made in response to the earthquake in Haiti. The church invited people to piece comforters, and then the congregation hosted a “Comforter Knotting Bee.” The congregation completed 21 comforters in an hour and a half, with a total of 28 comforters sent from the congregation. Through members Phil and Myriam Raber, the congregation has a personal connection to people in Haiti. A DVD of the project was also shared.

- A39. **Listening Process** – Ginny reviewed the Listening Team Proposal, which is one effort to work at improving communication with Conference leadership and the constituency. She requested that delegates give feedback to members of the Ministry Development Team.
- A40. **Moderator Transition** —Tom offered personal thanks and gratitude on behalf of the Conference to John for his six years of service as moderator. He presented John with a gift certificate for a getaway from the Leadership Team as a thank you for his work.
- A41. **Announcements** – Dean Beck thanked everyone for their assistance in the transitioning of space. He also made some final logistical announcements; he shared that hosting ACA fit into the hopes for the use of this facility.

Worship/Commissioning/Communion

Recorded by Sherah-Leigh Gerber