

Minutes of 44th ANNUAL CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY (ACA)
Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
Central Christian School, Kidron, Ohio
March 8-9, 2013

Theme—Signs of the Kingdom

Friday, March 8, 1:15-3:00 Business session #1 (Gym I)

A1. **Call to Order** – Moderator Marion Beyeler welcomed delegates to ACA and introduced Marg Baker from Oak Grove Mennonite Church (Smithville) to lead in the opening hymn.

A2. **Opening Song** – Marg led in singing “God of our Strength.”

A3. **Invocation** – Conference Minister Tom Kauffman opened the session with prayer.

A4. **“Ohio Conference Is.....”** – Tom and Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Coordinator of Volunteers, shared about the composition of the Conference, which includes 77 congregations, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation.

A5. **Introduction of New Pastors**– Each regional pastor introduced the pastors who have begun new pastoral assignments in the past Conference year: Jay Conn (Martins Creek), Myron Weaver (Berlin), Thomas Dunn (Crown Hill), Andy Stoner (Huber), Craig Strasbaugh (Kidron); those new to Conference: Preston Yoder (Cornerstone); and those in interim/transitional assignments: Deb Horst (Beaverdam), Bob Schloneger (Pleasant View), Ernie Hershberger (Longenecker), Larry Augsburg (Maple Grove, Hartville) and Tim Lehman (Central); those credentialed for chaplaincy: Erin Dye, Butch Nisley and Lydia Kuttab Brenneman. The pastors new to Conference were invited forward for a time of prayer. Retired ministers were invited to join in blessing these leaders as Tom offered a prayer.

A6. **Moderator Opening Comments** – Marion shared about the focus of our time together, introducing the ACA theme of “Signs of the Kingdom.” He noted the various ways that delegates can share feedback with Conference leadership.

A7. **Introduction of Resolutions Committee** – Ann Leaman, Ernie Hershberger and Sara Meyer were introduced by Marion. He directed delegates to the Report Book which outlines the process and purpose of bringing resolutions.

A8. **Missional story** – Marion noted that at the previous ACA, it was announced that there would be \$40,000 made available for congregational mission projects. As part of this ACA, recipients will be sharing their stories.

Norma Duerksen, pastor of Summit Mennonite Church, shared about the partnership with Barberton Area Community Ministries. The congregation has opened their building to be used by this food pantry ministry. The grant money from Conference along with four other grants were used to make the necessary renovations to the facilities. Each month more than 1,900 families are served by this ministry. She also recognized the contributions of their partner congregation, Hartville Mennonite.

A9. **Introductions in Table Groups**—Marion invited delegates to introduce themselves around the table.

A10. **Drama and Dwelling in the Word** — Eliot and Seth Nofziger led in a dramatic interpretation of the story of the official's son from John 4:43-54. Table groups then had time to reflect on the passage.

A11. **Minutes of 2012 ACA** – Marion gave opportunity for any corrections or additions to the minutes from the 43rd Annual Conference Assembly at First Mennonite Church (Berne, Ind.).

There was a motion to accept the minutes from the 2012 Annual Conference Assembly. M/S/P (no opposed). Vote was taken by standing.

A12. **Introduction and action on the Gifts Discernment Slate** – Delmar Hostetler, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, explained the process of appointments and nominations. Ballots were to be left on the table for collection. He showed a PowerPoint presentation that included photos of those currently in leadership and those up for affirmation. Del introduced Dean Beck, the nominee for moderator, and Rachel Kauffman, the nominee for assistant moderator. Nominees were invited to stand as Del reviewed the slate. He also highlighted the form through which Conference solicits nominations for Conference positions. The two goals that the Gifts Discernment Ministry has been working towards have been to include more persons under the age of 35 in leadership positions and to receive more responses from delegates of suggested volunteers. Del recognized the four members of the team completing their service: Nathan Beachy, Dottie Hathaway, Galen Nofziger and Jane Sauder.

A13. **Missional story** – Marion introduced Jim Frado, director of Everence for the Ohio region. Connecting with the Purposeful Plan, Jim shared about one way that Everence is working at addressing that priority. Through the partnership with the Lake Institute, Everence co-facilitated Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity events across the country, some of which included Ohio Conference congregations. He shared about the basic structure of the program which had more than 100 participants. Sharing updates from participating congregations, Jim illustrated the value of participating in this seminar event.

A14. **Narrative Spending Plan** – Lois Bontrager, chair of the Stewardship Ministry, introduced the narrative spending plan. She explained the purpose of the narrative model, sharing that the plan works to reflect the priorities and mission of Conference. She invited those with specific questions to join in a special session during the break time. Keith Hostetler explained the fund reserves that the Conference has. Last year, 20 percent of the reserve funds were released for congregational ministry grants. Keith noted the grant recipients from the past year. Again, Stewardship will make a percentage of reserve funds available for mission projects.

A15. **Introduction of Conference Visitors** – Tom introduced the organizations with displays and those representatives and contact people present.

A16. **Announcements and Welcome** – Tom shared a few announcements regarding schedule details. Dana Short shared about the Sister Care event happening in Bluffton April 26-27; this is a ministry of Mennonite Women USA. Bethany Nussbaum, Advancement Director at Central Christian School, welcomed Conference to the school; she shared a few announcements regarding the facility.

3:00-3:45 Displays and snacks

3:45-5:00 Alternate workshop for non-delegates

3 p.m. – Spending Plan Question Session (Library)

Present: Tom Kauffman, Marion Beyeler, Stan Helmuth, Keith Hostetler, Darrel Schweitzer, Keith Hostetler, Lois Bontrager, Scott Coulter, Ilene Nofziger, Ann Leaman

Marion had everyone introduce themselves and asked for questions about the spending plan.

Scott Coulter asked for more information about Line Item 44: Delegates to General Assembly. This amount is intended for the Ohio Conference to pay expenses for the Conference delegates to the Mennonite Church USA convention.

Keith Hostetler asked whether there is a sense that the presence of surplus funds leads to lower giving. Those present considered the question, but no definitive answer was reached.

Ilene Nofziger noted that online giving is increasing at West Clinton Mennonite Church, where she is treasurer. The group discussed the use of online giving, both for congregations and for Conference. They considered whether having congregations set up automated plans for giving to Ohio Conference could work well.

3:45-5:00 Business session #2 (Gym I)

A17. **Opening song** – Song Leader Marg Baker led the delegates in an opening song, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”

A18. **Drama and Dwelling in the Word** – Eliot and Seth Nofziger presented a drama based on John 6:16-25, focusing on Jesus walking on the water. Table groups discussed the drama and the scripture it was based on.

A19. **Ministry Development Team (MDT) Report** – Norma Duerksen, assistant moderator, reported on the work of the Ministry Development Team during the past year. She had members of the Ministry Development Team and staff members come forward and show how the groups interact.

Ministry Development Team member Mary Newcomer reported about the Conference’s Flat Menno Project. In this project, congregations are being asked to photograph Flat Menno with them in their various activities to help illustrate what is going on in the different congregations. The photos are being placed on the Flat Menno blog at <http://flatmenno.blogspot.com>.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber, coordinator of volunteers, reported about some upcoming events, including the Engaging the Community Seminar In April, the Pastor-Spouse Retreat in November, and a youth leadership training program planned in cooperation with Central Christian School and Camp Luz. The application deadline for the youth leadership program will be May 17.

Norma Duerksen also talked about her work as the Ohio Conference Resource Advocate, a position she has held for the past six years. She has been working to let everyone in the Conference know what resources are available from Mennonite agencies. She introduced the new Resource Advocate, Kris Nussbaum.

Randy Murray, Ministry Development Team member, talked about child protection policies and church safety. He was joined by two other people interested in child protection. Tara Steiner talked about

visiting a variety of congregations and seeing how families with children are treated. She strongly advocated that each congregation have a safe sanctuary policy. She is willing to make presentations to congregations about this issue. Kris Nussbaum talked about Kidron Mennonite Church's child protection policy and mentioned several other resources, including the Dove's Nest. Delegates were invited to give feedback in their table groups about child protection policies in their own congregations.

A20. Gifts Discernment Results – Gifts Discernment Chair Del Hostetler reported that delegates overwhelmingly affirmed all nominees on the slate.

A21. Announcements – Moderator Marion Beyler and Bethany Nussbaum made several announcements before delegates were dismissed for workshops and dinner.

5:15-6:15 Workshops/Displays

6:15-7:15 Dinner

7:30-8:45 Worship #1 (Kidron Mennonite Church)

8:45 p.m. Fellowship and Hymn Sing

Saturday, March 9

7:00-8:00 Ohio Mennonite Women's Breakfast – Camp Luz

7:00-8:00 Mennonite Men's Breakfast – Camp Luz

8:10-8:25 Prayer time (Rooms 403/405)

8:30-10:00 Service project at Camp Luz for non-delegates

8:30-10:00 Business session #3 (Gym I)

A22. Announcements—Marion made a few housekeeping announcements as people got settled.

A23. Opening song – Marg led the delegates in singing "I'll Praise my Maker."

A24. Drama and Dwelling in the Word—Eliot and Seth Nofziger performed a drama based on John 9:1-41, the healing of a man born blind. Time was given around tables to reflect on the text.

A25. Time of Prayer – Marion introduced Mattie Marie Mast, prayer coordinator, who led in a time of guided prayer. Delegates were invited to participate in a body prayer. She also gave an update on her husband, Mike, who was hospitalized a few days ago with bacterial pneumonia.

A26. Credentialing Ministry Report—Dave Maurer, member of the Credentialing Ministry, described what the ministry's tasks are. He also shared some of the current projects they are working on, which includes a protocol on the ethics related to ministry and the use of technology. Dealing with incidents of misconduct is part of the responsibility of this team. Dave showed bookmarks that have contact information for reporting misconduct that all congregations are to have.

A27. Missional Story – Nan Kanagy, co-pastor at Friendship Mennonite, shared about the ministry of City Fresh Market, which received a grant from the Conference this year. This community supported agriculture program can accept payment from those on food stamps, providing fresh healthy food for all people. Anita Hooley Yoder, intern at Friendship, shared two particular stories of interactions with people who participated in the program that were meaningful for her.

A28. **Five-Year Plan Update**—Marion reminded delegates of the plan approved to increase staffing for the work of Ohio Conference. He reviewed the projected deficit and shared that the shortfall in giving has not been as much as expected. A team has been assembled to assess the progress of this plan, and they will be reporting to the Leadership Team in the coming Conference year.

A29. **Approving Narrative Spending Plan** – Lois noted that some of the changes both in the line items and the format came from cluster meetings. Time was given for discussion of the motion, but there was none.

There was a motion to accept the Spending Plan for Ohio Conference 2013-2014. M/S/C (no opposed). The vote was taken by a show of hands.

A30. **Central Christian Schools Report** — Marion introduced Gene Miller, head administrator of Central Christian School. Gene shared about the continuous improvement plan, the Heart of Central program, the recent successful auction, plans to grow and develop the music program through a generous large donation, and the upcoming science symposium. He offered thanks to the board for their hard work and leadership.

There was a motion to approve the corporation members for Central Christian School for 2013-2014. M/S/C (no opposed). The vote was taken by standing.

A31. **Missional story** – Haroldo Nunes, staff person for Open Arms Hispanic Ministry, shared about a recent trip to Guatemala that was funded through an Ohio Conference grant. Three representatives from Open Arms went to connect with some people who had previously been part of the ministry in Wayne County. They were also exploring the possibility of offering pastoral leadership training for those who were converted in Ohio and have returned to their home communities.

A32. **Denominational Report** – Terry Shue, denominational minister for Leadership Development, shared a video that highlighted the vision statement of Mennonite Church USA and the ways the ministries are living into this vision. It also highlighted the priorities of the Purposeful Plan. Terry brought greetings from the denomination. He shared about the upcoming Convention, planned for July in Phoenix. The representatives from the denominational agencies who were present were introduced. Dean Heisey, representing Mennonite Mission Network, highlighted some ways that their agency works to support the mission endeavors of local congregations. Lois Bontrager, from Everence, named some of the ways their agency supports the integration of faith and finances. Steve Carpenter, representing Menno Media, highlighted some of the new resources being offered.

A33. **Missional Investment**—Sherah-Leigh highlighted the three areas of emphasis in increasing missional investment—church planting, short term mission trip opportunities, and voluntary service opportunities.

A34. **Announcements**—Tom highlighted the upcoming Men’s Retreat and also made a few announcements regarding logistics.

10:00-10:45 Displays and snacks (Gym II)

10:45-12:00 Worship #2 (Performing Arts Center)

12:15-1:10 Lunch

1:10-2:10 Workshops/displays

2:15-4:00 Business session #4 (Gym I)

A35. **Opening song** – Song Leader Marg Baker led the delegates in an opening song, “Praise God from Whom.”

A36. **Drama and Dwelling in the Word** – Eliot and Seth Nofziger presented a drama based on John 11, dramatizing the raising of Lazarus. Table groups discussed the drama and the scripture it was based on.

A37. **Coordinator of Volunteers Report** – Sherah-Leigh Gerber introduced the Ohio Conference prayer cards that were on the delegates’ tables. She said that the deadline to apply for grant money will likely be near the end of the August. She also reported on the Ohio Youth Event, which took place at Bluffton University in July 2012. One hundred youth and sponsors took part in the event. Feedback was very positive, and a second youth event is planned for July 2014.

A38. **Camp Luz Report** – Andrew Michaels, director of Camp Luz, reported about the camp. The camp has been in existence for 60 years, and many changes have taken place over the years. He noted several highlights for the camp: a 10 percent increase in summer camp attendance, donors who have contributed to the capital drive, and ending the year in a strong financial position. He also noted several temptations, including the temptation to take credit for what God has been doing and the temptation to bask in the glory of what has been done and not continue the work. He and the Camp Luz staff are committed to pressing forward, and he asked for prayers for the camp.

A39. **Missional Story** – Alex Dye, associate pastor of Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty, reported about the West Liberty Community Vegetable Garden, which received a grant from the Ministry Development Team. God has been working through the community garden in West Liberty. He read from Genesis 3, referring to working the soil. Oak Grove began the garden several years ago. The garden moved to a new location two years ago, behind a greenhouse on land owned by Adriel. Participants can garden free 10’ by 10’ plots. Tools, water and seeds are provided. The garden is a way to meet people in the community and is a way to connect with the youth at Adriel. Also, the garden is a way to lower food costs for people in the community. The garden organizers will be purchasing tools and a shed with the grant money from Ohio Conference. They would like to set aside several plots to grow vegetables for the local food pantry, and they are open to having volunteers.

A40. **Report on Numbers of Delegates and Congregations at ACA** – Moderator Marion Beyeler reported that attendance at this Annual Conference Assembly totaled 319 people from 64 congregations.

A41. **Drawing for Delegate Incentives** – Conference Minister Tom Kauffman held the drawing for special gifts for the delegates who had completed the delegate checklist. Those chosen to receive gifts were John Zook, Charles Marshall, Wes Graber and Karla Roth. Marion Beyeler also announced that Julia Beyeler was the winner of the special gift basket from Mennonite Mutual Insurance.

A42. Open Mike Time

Andy Stoner, former regional pastor and current pastor of Huber Mennonite Church – He expressed that it is good to be back in Ohio after a year of voluntary service. He and his wife, Anita, are now living in Springfield. He noted that the International Guest House in Washington, D.C., where they served for a year, is looking for volunteers from April to August.

Eldon King, Pleasant View – He commended the planners of Annual Conference Assembly. He found worship experiences to be very meaningful, and he affirmed the use of people within the Conference.

Keith Hostetler, Crown Hill and member of Stewardship Ministry – He was approached by someone who said that we need to acknowledge the congregations who are struggling. He noted that one congregation will be closing this month. We do want to be building churches and growing.

A43. **Announcements** – Marion Beyeler made several announcements, including a notice that a summary video of ACA will be ready on the Conference website by the end of next week. He also noted that next year ACA will be held the second weekend in March at Bluffton University.

A44. **Moderator's Comments** – Marion Beyeler made a few comments about his time as moderator of the Ohio Conference. He feels privileged to have been a part of this conference, and he is grateful for the challenges and differences, saying, "I come to you highly encouraged today." God is working through his people. As long as we continue to keep Christ as the center of our faith and work at reconciliation to each other, we have a wonderful future, even though it may not always be easy.

A45. **Leadership Transfer** – Conference Minister Tom Kauffman expressed appreciation for Moderator Marion Beyeler and Assistant Moderator Norma Duerksen, who are concluding their terms of service. They will receive specially made mugs as a token of the Conference's thanks. Marion introduced Dean Beck, the incoming Conference Moderator, and presented him with a towel and basin as a symbol of his servant leadership. Dean Beck made a few comments about accepting this new role and expressed his excitement. He expressed his appreciation for Marion's leadership in the past three years.

A46. **Communion** – Conference Minister Tom Kauffman and the regional pastors served communion to the delegates.

A47. **Announcements** – Marion Beyeler made a few final announcements.

A48. **Closing Song** – Song leader Marg Baker led the delegates in a closing hymn, "Heart with Loving Heart United."

Recorded by Sherah-Leigh Gerber and Ann Leaman