

**Minutes of 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)**  
**Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA**  
**First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana**  
**March 9-10, 2012**

**Theme—A Sower went out to sow...**

**Friday, March 9, 1:30 p.m.—Business Session #1 (Family Life Center)**

A1. **Call to Order** – Moderator Marion Beyeler welcomed the delegates to Annual Conference Assembly. He introduced himself, Conference Minister Tom Kauffman and Brent Hyman, worship pastor from First Mennonite (Berne).

A2. **Invocation** – Tom led in a prayer for the meeting time.

A3. **Opening Song** – Brent welcomed the group to Indiana and to First Mennonite. He shared why he chose the opening hymn, “Come We That Love The Lord,” and led the group in singing together.

A4. **Moderator Opening Comments** – Marion gave some introductory comments about the Conference and offered some highlights of what will happen at ACA. He noted that more than 4,000 hours of volunteer time is contributed to the ministry of the Conference. He introduced the staff, having them stand to be recognized. A few housekeeping items were noted including announcements about new components to the gathering. Marion explained the “parking lot” and how to share comments there. First Mennonite (Berne) was recognized for the welcome and amount of work that the congregation has done to welcome and host Conference.

A5. **Introduction of Resolutions** – The committee, Ross Miller, Rick Sprunger and Ann Leaman, were introduced. Marion also noted where in the report book the procedural information for bringing resolutions can be found. He also highlighted the intent and purpose of resolutions.

A6. **Minutes of 2011 ACA** – Marion noted that Roberts’ Rules of order are followed for actions. He highlighted the motions from Annual Conference Assembly 2011. Opportunity was given for corrections or questions.

**There was motion to accept the minutes as presented. M/S/P (no opposed).** Vote was taken by a show of hands.

A7. **Missional story** – Jason Rissler, church planter in Strasburg, shared a bit about his background in church planting and how their family came to Ohio Conference. There are eleven congregations in eastern Ohio that have partnered together to support this work in Strasburg. Currently there is a core group that meets in the Rissler home for weekly Bible study as well as the work of developing relationships in the community. He reflected on the hard work of developing trust with people which then opens opportunities to share the message of Jesus, sharing the story of the relationships they are nurturing with their neighbors. Jason challenged each delegate to be aware of persons that they could be connecting with to draw others into relationship with Christ.

A8. **Introductions of new pastors** – Tom introduced the regional pastors and invited them to introduce the new pastors within their regions. The congregations and regions were illustrated on a powerpoint slide. Matt Hamsher introduced Harold Mansfield (Hartville), David Windham (Hartville), Jimmy Harr (Hillside), Rick Miller (Maple Grove, Hartville), Joel Mast (Smithville), Jeff Bartlett (South Union), Jason Rissler (Strasburg), and Jacob Dodson (Wooster). Ralph Reinford introduced Adam Houser (Peace), Jessica King (Sonnenberg), and Dan Owolabi (Walnut Creek). Wanda Stopher introduced Israel Aguilar (Good Shepherd), Jeff Kauffman (Zion), and Jane Friesen (Zion). The pastors were invited to come forward as they were introduced. Wanda led in a special prayer for Jane who is undergoing treatment for cancer. Tom led in a prayer for the new pastors and their congregations.

**A9. History Book Unveiling**—Marion introduced former Moderator John Rohrer who led the efforts along with Celia Lehman in bringing the Ohio Conference History Book to completion. Marion offered condolences to John whose mother passed away yesterday morning. John noted that this book is a companion to the Grant Stoltzfus book that traced the origins of the Conference through 1968. Celia was recognized for her efforts as editor. John shared how Celia gathered information for the book as well as highlighted the contents of the book which includes the Ohio data from Conrad Kanagy's study *Roadsigns for the Journey* as well as essays from various Conference leaders. Marion thanked John and Celia for their work on this project.

**A10. Table Groups**—Marion invited delegates to introduce themselves to each other around their tables.

**A11. Narrative Spending Plan** – Stewardship Team members Lois Bontrager, chairperson, and Keith Hostetler introduced the spending plan and explained the new narrative form along with the traditional line by line plan. Lois explained why the Conference has introduced a narrative form and how the categories are arranged in line with the Conference emphases. She noted that the major change in how the spending plan is set up is in having the pastoral staff salaries and benefits divided into the various categories. Lois noted at the last ACA, the five year plan was approved. To date no funds have needed to be transferred from the surplus funds. A video clip was shown of an interview with West Clinton about the value of the support and resources of Conference in their pastoral transition. Opportunity was given for table groups to discuss the narrative format along with the allocation of staff time.

Keith explained the balance sheet and related documents to the delegates. He shared the Stewardship Team recommendation to use 20 percent of the reserve funds for Ministry Development projects. Time was given for delegates to discuss around tables the recommendation, the new format, and project priorities for these funds.

Mic time was given for questions. There was affirmation for the narrative format alongside the line by line document. There was affirmation for releasing funds to be used for ministry development. Suggestions included: concretize purposeful plan priorities within the Conference, additional church planting efforts, support for Camp Luz, Conference leadership development, mission efforts within the Conference and abroad, giving outreach efforts priority, connecting with and ministering to young adults, online worship resources, or to provide capital funds for congregations wanting to start new outreach initiatives.

It was noted that there will be a special session for those delegates with specific questions related to the budget allocations.

Marion thanked the Stewardship Team for their work in the past Conference year.

**A12. Announcements & Welcome** – Jeff Linthicum, pastor of First Mennonite (Berne), welcomed the delegates to the church. He introduced Rod Lehman, the point person from the congregation who has worked at the logistics. Rod shared some announcements and emergency procedure information.

**3:00-3:45 p.m. – Poster Sessions and Displays with snacks (Foyer/patio/Family Life Center)**

**3:15-3:45 p.m.— Conference Spending Plan Q&A (Family Life Center, side room)**

**Present:** Patrick Helmuth, Chris Walker, Jim Bartholomew, Keith Hostetler, Marion Beyeler, Lois Bontrager, Tom Kauffman and Sherah-Leigh Gerber

Tom explained the history of the capital accounts and how they have been designated. The accumulated surplus is a result from staffing cuts. Question about what percent of the budget goes to mission/evangelism, specifically relating to breakout of budget: 80 percent Conference, 10 percent MC USA support, 10 percent evangelism; concern that evangelism/church planting isn't a large enough investment of Conference resources. If there is clarity about how much is being spent for evangelism, will we be satisfied with the amount spent towards those ends; suggestion that reporting be done in such a way that evangelism funds are trackable (i.e. transferring in capital funds to income and then through the budget for investing in the church plant). How can we discuss and evaluate (as delegates) our efforts in evangelism.

Question about the deficit and how Conference is addressing that. Conversation about the Conference efforts to increase congregational support when congregational budgets are shrinking; follow up about forming a team to continue to do the work to advocate for congregational giving and/or individual contributions.

**3:45-5:00 p.m.— Business session #2 (Family Life Center)**

A13. **Opening song** – Marion welcomed the delegates back together and introduced Sam Tijerina from Good Shepherd. Sam led in the Spanish chorus “Cuando Levanto mis Manos.” The delegates sang “Happy Birthday” to volunteer Danae King.

A14. **Prayer Ministry** – Marion introduced Mattie Marie Mast, coordinator of the Conference Prayer ministry. Mattie Marie shared a testimony of an experience of healing her family experienced through lifting their hands in prayer, which the song reminded her of. She highlighted the *Prayer Prompter*, a bi-monthly resource. Referencing a hymn “Day by Day,” Mattie Marie shared that there are pray-ers through the entirety of the delegates’ work in addition to the morning prayer time designated on Saturday morning. She noted the availability of the prayer room as well as the prayer baskets around the facility to receive any requests from Conference participants.

A15. **Gifts Discernment Slate** – Marion welcomed Delmar Hostetler, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, who presented the slate. Delmar noted where delegates can find the ministry report. He outlined the process for creating the ballot. He reviewed the ballot inviting persons to stand as they were named. Delegates were given time to respond to the ballot. Delmar also recognized his team members and requested that delegates give suggestions to the team for future placements; the goals are to increase the participation of younger persons (under age 35) and to increase the number of nomination forms submitted.

A16. **Ministry Development Team (MDT) Report** – Norma Duerksen, chair, shared how the team works, forming resource teams that implement programs and resources for congregations. Using the word “gift,” Norma highlighted the various projects from MDT this year. She invited delegates to stand for the events they participated in. Events included: history book, retreats, family system events, listening projects, and young adult resource team. Norma also highlighted some upcoming events that MDT is planning. Around tables, groups were invited to discuss the needs and issues of their congregations and to list ideas for programming and resources from MDT. Marion thanked MDT for their work, recognizing Norma and Sherah-Leigh’s efforts.

A17. **Introduction of conference visitors** – Tom introduced those persons who brought displays.

A18. **Credentialing Ministry**—Mona Sauder, chair, introduced the members of the ministry. She then reviewed the protocol established by the team for addressing accusations of pastoral misconduct. Marion and Tom recognized and thanked Mona for her term of service as chair of the Credentialing Ministry and contributions to Leadership Team.

A19. **Missional Story** – Jeff Smith, pastor of Central Mennonite, shared about a ministry of the Northwest Ohio Mennonite Ministers Fellowship, Kingdom Leadership Advancement. This ministry was developed out of the questions being asked about how to raise up leaders. The purpose is to call, equip and empower persons for formal ministry. This happens through opportunities for persons to explore their sense of call, exchanging interns among congregations within the northwest cluster, planning and offering formal and informal educational opportunities.

A20. **Ballot Results**—Marion reported that there was overwhelming affirmation for those nominated on the ballot.

A21. **Announcements** – Rod shared logistical information, in particular for the evening activities.

**5:15-8:45 Dinner, workshops, displays, worship, fellowship**

**Saturday, March 10**

**8:30-10:00 Business session #3 (Family Life Center)**

A22. **Opening song** – Marion called the group to gather. Steve Troyer from Pike Mennonite invited people to greet each other. Then he and his daughter Kristin led in “I Owe the Lord a Morning Song.”

A23. **Conference Snapshots**—Marion explained how Leadership Team and Ministry Development Team use the feedback received from table group discussion. Encouraging stewardship teaching within congregations is one of the emphases that the Conference is committed to. One way this happens is through partnership with Everence.

A24. **Stewardship Emphasis and Dreams** – Lois shared her reflections on what the phrase “stewardship dreams” means to her and in the congregational context. She highlighted the Everence website as a resource for congregations. Managing Director for Everence, Jim Frado, highlighted remarks about scarcity and abundance from the denomination’s purposeful plan. He invited delegates to reflect on the connection between a missional call and generosity. The Lakewood Institute of Faith & Giving, a division of the school of Philanthropy at Indiana University has a program that Everence is participating in which will be providing training and a two-day interactive seminar experience for Conference congregations entitled “Creating Cultures of Congregational Generosity.” Lois Bontrager will be one of the trained leaders. He invited congregations to consider participating and gave information about with whom to register interest.

A25. **Missional story** – Tom shared about a “Firstfruits check,” a significant individual donation made to the Conference, dated January 1, 2012. With this person’s permission, the story was shared that this donor always gives a tithe. Part of the motivation for this life-long decision grows out of the modeling the donor experienced growing up. Tom also referenced Luke 12:48 and 2 Corinthians 9 about sowing and giving, a verse that this donor cites for the commitment to firstfruits giving. In addition to financial giving, the donor is actively involved in the local congregational context, giving of time and talents as well. An important phrase from his father that motivates him is, “You cannot out give God.”

A26. **Approving Narrative Spending Plan** – Lois noted that there has been much affirmation for the narrative spending plan and transparent reporting. She noted there were a few concerns raised in the special budget session which the Leadership Team and Stewardship Ministry will continue to work at responding to.

**Motion to approve the 2012-2013 Spending Plan. (M/S/C) no opposed.** Vote was taken by a show of hands.

Lois reported that more than \$3,000 was given in the offering at last night’s worship. These monies will go to defray Assembly expenses as well as to support the church planting effort at Strasburg along with denominational church planting efforts.

A27. **Central Christian Schools**—Gene Miller, head administrator, shared about the exciting year the school is having with special celebrations in honor of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The school has partnered with Bluffton University to offer dual enrollment programs. Advanced Ed and Mennonite Education Agency are working with Central to become accredited. The school has many facilities needs, however, the school has experienced generosity from the community, highlighted in the recent auction which raised more than \$370,000 in addition to increased enrollment. Gene expressed the desire to continue to keep close relationships with congregations.

**There was a motion to accept the corporation members for Central Christian School. (M/S/C) no opposed.** Vote was taken by a show of hands.

A28. **Missional story** –Aaron Adelsberger, representing Adriel, shared about the mission of the agency, which began as an orphanage in Orrville, Ohio. Currently, this ministry is a residential facility in West Liberty for children with foster care networks in satellite locations, serving 400 children each year. This Christian organization works to meet the physical and spiritual needs of children. He highlighted their new youth wellness initiative, their green initiative to move towards being a zero waste campus. This past year they celebrated the baptism of nine youth. He shared the lyrics from his favorite praise song, which reflects the ministry of Adriel.

A29. **Teacher Training**—Bill Seymour, lead pastor from Orrville Mennonite and MDT member, shared about an upcoming seminar for laypersons who would like to gain skills and confidence for teaching Sunday School. This event will be offered in April in both the eastern and western regions.

A30. **Denominational Report** – Terry Shue shared as a representative from the denomination. He invited the delegates to recite the vision statement together. Terry invited the agency representatives to each share how their work strengthens the work of the congregations. Amy Gingerich, MennoMedia, shared about the faith formation resources, both print and video resources that are available. Dean Heisey and Stanley Green represented Mennonite Mission Network. They reflected the partnership role that they take with congregations to facilitate congregational mission initiatives. In particular, Dean noted the Mongolian Mission Partnership within Ohio Conference. He also noted a listening process that Network has been engaged in to learn how to better resource conferences and congregations. Stanley highlighted their missional reflection resource, *Beyond Ourselves* and *Missio Dei*. Lois Bontrager, Everence, invited congregations to share stewardship needs with the agency.

Terry mentioned the seven priorities with outlined goals and strategies are part of the Purposeful Plan that was discussed at Pittsburgh. He reminded delegates that the Purposeful Plan is not just for denominational staff but also for conferences and congregations. He asked the agencies to also share about projects that they are working on related to the Purposeful Plan. MennoMedia is working with the denominational leadership office to work on a core scripture Bible study resource. Everence is offering the “Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity” workshop opportunity. Network is engaging Mennonite communities of color to design a service opportunity to foster participation and intercultural transformation. Terry led in a prayer of blessing for the Conference.

A31. **Listening Project Report**—Sherah-Leigh Gerber, coordinator of volunteers, outlined the process that congregations have been invited to participate in, noting the questions congregations were asked to reflect on. To date, 35 congregations have participated. She invited other interested congregations to contact the Conference Office to set up a time to meet.

A32. **Ministry Grant**—Congregations who displayed at the Ministry Fair were eligible for the drawing of a \$500 grant for their ministry from the Ministry Development Team. North Lima’s monthly breakfast was the recipient. This fundraiser brings in many from the community. The money is then used to support congregational mission projects.

A33. **Missional story**—Delmar Nussbaum, from Crown Hill, shared a story from the food pantry ministry in their congregation. This “choice” food pantry offers a one-on-one shopping experience for clients, being good stewards of the resources and giving opportunity to build relationship. They average more than 250 families being served each month. They have noticed a significant increase in families needing assistance in this year.

A34. **Announcements** – Marion requested that congregations with pre-purchased history books pick up their copies from the Registration table; he reminded the delegates that Celia is available for signing books. Rod reminded those participating in block workshops need to go through the food line first. He highlighted that worship will include communion. He also noted the items that should be left upon de-registration.

**10:00-2:10**      **Poster sessions and displays with snacks, worship, lunch, workshops**

**2:15-4:00**      **Business session #4 (Family Life Center)**

A35. **Call to Order**—Marion called the delegates to the final work session, reporting that 61 congregations were represented with 240 delegates and 310 total participants in Annual Conference Assembly.

A 36. **Opening song** – Brent led in “Gentle Shepherd.”

**A37. Missional story** – The Young Adult Resource Team performed a skit to illustrate the misconceptions about the differences between young adults and other people within the congregation and to explain the goals and dreams of their team. Tamara Gill shared about how the team was formed. She also highlighted the special events that the team planned to be part of this ACA, which featured alternative workshops and a service project, both of which allowed for intergenerational relationship building. The team also gave out prizes for those who completed the “people bingo” cards the team distributed. April 13-14 there will be a retreat led by Dave Maurer at Camp Luz for young adults within Ohio Conference.

**A38. Table Discussion**—Delegates were invited to spend time naming the kinds of resourcing for young adult ministry that would be valuable in their congregational settings.

**A39. Camp Luz** – Andrew Michaels, director, shared the new logo and reported on the staffing changes that they have experienced in the past year. A capital campaign is now underway to help with facilities upgrades. Andrew shared about the need that was identified and led to the formation of Camp Luz; he shared some facts provided by the camping association which illustrate the value and unique role of camp ministry. He invited delegates to: pray for the camp ministry, send children from their congregations and communities to camp, share positive camp experiences with others, bring a group to camp, and to give time, talent and treasure.

**A40. Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship**—Tom and Wanda Stopher, regional pastor for Cincinnati, offered a time of blessing and release for the Fellowship. Cincinnati Mennonite has been in a dual conference relationship. Through a deliberation process they have decided to be singly affiliated with Central District. Pastor Joel Miller shared the history of the church’s planting, which was a joint effort between Ohio and Central District Conference. He expressed gratitude for the resources and experiences that the Fellowship has been part of, but also named the realities and challenges of dual affiliation which has led to this decision. Delegate Keith Lehman presented a gift to the Conference. The metal work piece is entitled “Branching Vitality.”

**A41. Recognition of Service**—Tom offered words of blessing and affirmation for Herman Myers’ 43 years of service to the Conference. Herman reflected on the amount of change he has been part of in the life of the Conference as well as some of the roles he has served in. He received the thanks of the delegate body.

**A42. Appreciation** – Marion expressed thanks to First Mennonite for hosting the Assembly.

**A43. Open Mic**— Encouragement was given for the Conference to continue and strengthen its mission efforts. There was affirmation for those who contributed to the history book project, for Conference staff’s work in planning and leading ACA, and gratitude for the time given to focus on young adult ministry.

**A44. Ohio Youth Event**—Matt Hamsher highlighted the upcoming Ohio Conference youth event that will be at Bluffton University June 29-July 1. This event has grown out of the requests from constituent congregations. The theme will be “Good Soil” focused on the Mark 4 passage. He shared the event goals, slated speakers along with Jeremy Kempf and band leading worship.

**A45. Announcements**—Marion noted that a summary of ACA will be available in digital format on the Conference website within the next week. He also announced that ACA 2013 will be the second weekend in March at Central Christian School. An invitation was extended for those staying around to participate in the 10 a.m. worship service at First Mennonite on Sunday.