

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA Private Minutes
Ministry Development Team Meeting #3
Aug. 25, 2014
Wooster Mennonite Church, Wooster, Ohio

Present: Dean Beck, Jacob Dodson, David Elkins, Wes Graber, Kevin Kanagy, Rachel Kauffman, Tom Kauffman, Judy King, Ann Leaman, Jodi Miller, Mary Newcomer, Ralph Reinford, Darrel Schweitzer, Dana Short, Wanda Stopher

Absent: Darrel Schweitzer

- M27. **Opening and devotions.** Jodi Miller shared from their weekend church camping retreat, which revolved around the theme, "Rooted in the Word," based on the parable found in Matthew 13:1-9. The scripture reminds us that seed is being sown in our communities and throughout our conference. Once the seed is sown and scattered, it needs to be cultivated and tended to so we can all continue to grow in our faith. A prayer request was shared for the family of the janitor at Toledo Mennonite who has lost family members to the Ebola virus. Rachel led in prayer.
- M28. **Minutes.** The minutes from the May 19, 2014, meeting were approved as presented.
- M29. **New pastor orientation.** It was reported that the new pastor orientation did not take place as originally planned because the dates were in the middle of a busy tourist season and the lodging costs made it unaffordable.
- M30. **Surplus Funds Grant Requests were reviewed:**
Mustard Seed Sessions. Reed Jones, Oak Grove Mennonite (West Liberty) is requesting funds to produce copies of a CD (hymns performed on a solo guitar), with all proceeds going directly to Adriel's Spiritual Development Program. It is something new, it is a community outreach, and the focus is on youth ministry. It fits within all three of the Conference priorities of worship, faith and witness. Also, it is a collaborative project. Additionally, Reed is willing to present his music in Ohio Conference churches at no charge.

Listening for Grace production. Michael Short, along with others from Central, Lockport, Salem (Elida), North Clinton West Clinton and Zion Mennonite churches are sponsoring a presentation of *Listening for Grace* by Ted and Company. It is a collaborative effort, it involves community outreach, it works at reconciliation. There was some concern expressed about the theological narrative that may come through in this production.

Shoulder-2-Shoulder – Oak Grove (Smithville) is helping to build the International Impact College in Kenya through Christian Church International, an associate member of Mennonite World Conference. Oak Grove is sending several work teams and has partnered with Crown Hill, Smithville, Lee Heights and Sonnenberg Mennonite churches in this project. It is collaborative, it is a global partnership, it fits in well with our three priorities. This example would be an encouragement for other congregations to work together collaboratively.

In-Service Workshop for Ohio Conference Pastors. The Credentialing Ministry Team is asking for funds to cover the costs of offering regional in-service workshops for pastors around the topic of "Pornography and Cyber-Sex Addiction." The goal is to equip our pastors in this area and to make it as accessible as possible by not charging the pastors to attend. An inquiry was made about offering this workshop to a wider audience beyond Ohio Conference pastors.

Tutor Mentoring Project – The Toledo Mennonite Tutoring Program would like to partner with The Toledo Campus Ministry's internship program for this year by using an intern to create and implement a structure for mentoring the teen tutors involved in their program. This is one-time stipend. The work of the intern for this year will form the foundation for ongoing development of the tutoring program in the future. There are two elementary schools in the neighborhood that they serve. This program benefits children and youth and fits in with our witness priority.

Stephen Ministry startup. Kidron Mennonite is starting a Stephen Ministry at Kidron Mennonite Church and would like some assistance with the initial costs of training and starting the program. It would be good to see the congregation invest somewhat in the costs of the program as well.

- M31. **Regional pastor report** – Ralph Reinford shared the following:
- The grant program is a real way of connecting with our congregations, and he has heard a lot of appreciation for it. It allows for creativity and to think outside the box. It encourages working together and collaborating with others.
 - Many congregations have been spending a lot of time and energy working at and processing biblical discernment around the topic of human sexuality. With the special delegate session behind us, many are trying to regroup and figure out what we should be doing. A good approach might be like that of a Little League coach who told his team, “It is okay to cry because the season is over, but we’ll always be friends. Let’s have a group hug!” Perhaps the Ministry Development Team should now be thinking about ways we can encourage congregations to be more missional right now. Rather than focusing inwardly, perhaps we can get back to doing church by encouraging outreach, by promoting service projects between congregations, etc.
- M32. **Regional Pastor Report** – Wanda Stopher shared the following:
- She is continuing her practice of making pastoral contacts throughout the summer. This year she focused on the value of relationships and having conversations with God, with self, with spouse, with congregation, with conference and with the denomination. Our conversations have profound impact on our relationships. Related to this is that we should strive to have conversations with persons we don’t necessarily agree with, be it cross-conference, cross-congregational, cross-pastor peer group, etc.
 - Secondly, she hears people talk about Conference as if it is an entity of its own. We are Conference together. The whole idea of doing together what we can’t do apart from each other gives her purpose and passion for her work.
 - The ideas that have been shared with us by delegates at ACA the last two years have included comments about the value of sabbaticals. Our larger churches can provide sabbaticals, but how can we help make this possible for our bi-vocational pastors and pastors of smaller churches? Is there something we can do to make it possible? One idea is being implemented by Good Shepherd Mennonite. Wanda is working with them as they enter a one-year period of discernment as a congregation and their pastor will be getting a six-week break from pastoral responsibilities during that time to be doing his own discernment.
- M33. **Conference Minister report.** Tom Kauffman distributed a written report.
- Reflections on the Aug 9 meeting. There were some things that we could agree on. All three of our visitors to Mountain States declared they were not in agreement with what Mountain States did. None of the resolutions or amendments presented were asking for a change to our Confession of Faith. We agreed by an overwhelming majority that the action Mountain States took was at variance with our Confession of Faith. The question is, “What do we do about it?” Is Ohio Conference the entity to do that? When Mennonite Church USA was formed, each group brought their own traditions and assumptions about how church works together. We put together guidelines that we thought addressed both sets of understandings. But what functionally happened was that we did not fully appreciate all the assumptions of how the other side understood those practices, and disagreements unfolded. One positive is that we have done some relationship-building with our brothers and sisters in Mountain States through our visit in spite of being in disagreement with their actions.
 - Grant proposals. Some of the grant proposals we have received have been great examples of collaborative efforts in their own communities and beyond. He suggested developing some kind of a brochure around their projects that regional pastors could use to share with other congregations to get them thinking about projects they might want to pursue.
- M34. **Questionnaire to pastors about young adult connections.** Wes Graber reported that one response came back the first week. The key component that was suggested in that response was the importance of relationships. Wes reported on an article on this topic about barriers that keep young adults from being involved in the church and factors that are important in keeping them connected. We wondered why we received only one response to the letter that was sent in June. The timing may not have been the best, and there was no deadline given to respond. Judy will resend the letter and add a deadline.
- M35. **Lunch.** A delicious lunch was provided by Rachel Kauffman.
- M36. **Website development update.** Kevin Kanagy reported on the work that has been done so far on creating an updated Conference website and we looked at the format that has been developed so far. Because there are concerns about the difficulty of working with Drupal, the program used to create and maintain the

website, it seems best to look at other options. Our present website is user-friendly when it comes to updating the information there, and it is reasonably priced to maintain, but has some major drawbacks. There are limits on how many tabs can be added at the bottom of each page. Tabs or menu items should ideally be at the top of the page, instead of at the bottom, which is a more standardized format. Each page only uses a fraction of the screen space, and it uses older Flash technology. Additionally, it doesn't appear as it should on tablets and phones. Some suggestions were given of other options that are available. We want something that looks good, is functional and not difficult to maintain. Kevin will look into getting some quotes for setting up a new website.

M37. **Resourcing Survey.** A survey was sent to all of our delegates earlier this summer. We received responses from 41 persons representing 32 congregations, which is a bit less than 50 percent of our congregations.

Feedback: Having materials available was consistently high. Some wanted workshops, but not many wanted to host them at their own church, but rather wanted them offered in their area. There was high interest in worship (especially prayer and involvement of children and youth), marriage enrichment and discipleship. Tom reported that we used to offer marriage enrichment seminars regularly, but attendance fell off dramatically. Perhaps it is time to offer them again.

Suggestions were given around ways that we could offer resourcing to our congregations. Some workshops have received a good response. Some have not. Materials were requested more than workshops in this survey. How could that be done?

It was suggested that everything we offer focus around our priorities of worship, faith, witness and prayer. One idea was to include resources in each issue of *Ohio Mennonite Evangel* by including, for example, a "Prayer Corner," a "Worship Corner," etc. Another idea was to include "I believe" statements. Our worship, faith, witness and prayer focus leaders were asked to bring ideas back to our next meeting.

M38. **Finalize grant proposals.**

- Oak Grove-West Liberty – Mustard Seed Sessions: Hymn CD production with proceeds going to Adriel's Spiritual Development Program. Reed Jones is open to presenting his program to churches. \$1,229.30 requested and approved. (Addendum – By ordering 500 CDs instead of 400 CDs, the unit price came down, and the total price was \$1,154.30 instead of \$1,229.30.)
- Northwest Ohio churches – Listening for Grace presentation by Ted and Company in northwest Ohio. After an extended discussion, the requested amount of \$750 was granted.
- Shoulder-2-Shoulder – Oak Grove (Smithville) partnering with Christian Church International to build an International Impact College in Kenya. It was noted that we are willing to fund this project at the full amount requested, but only because we can afford to do so this year. This is not a precedent for amounts we may grant in future years. It was also suggested that they publicize and set up a way that they might receive individual donations for this project. Approved \$11,500.
- Credentialing Ministry Team – Pornography and Cyber-Sex Addiction In-Service regional workshops for Ohio Conference pastors. Approved up to \$2,000, pending the final expenses.
- Toledo Mennonite Church – Tutor Mentoring Project. Approved \$3,000.
- Kidron Mennonite – Start-up costs to begin Stephen Ministries at their church. The congregation should have some ownership in the expenses of getting this program started. Requested \$7,955. Approved \$5,000.

Rachel encouraged MDT members to assist in writing the letters approving the grants and be willing to do follow-up as well. Volunteers should contact Rachel.

M39. **Volunteer Coordinator.** Tom gave an update. There have been applicants for the position. Some were not a good fit for the job, some were also looking for other positions. If anyone has suggested persons to contact, give those suggestions to Tom or Rachel.

M40. **Next meeting** – Nov. 17, 2014, at Wooster Mennonite.

M41. **Adjournment** at 3 p.m.