

Minutes of the 49th Annual Conference Assembly (ACA)
Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio
March 9-10, 2018

1-3 p.m. — Business Session #1

A1. **Welcome** — Moderator Bob Sauder introduced the president of Bluffton University, James Harder, who welcomed the delegates to Annual Conference Assembly.

A2. **Opening Song** — Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in an opening song, “Holy Spirit, Come with Power.”

A3. **Prayer** — Hannah Troyer, a member of Summit Mennonite Church, led the delegates in a time of prayer.

A4. **Moderator’s Opening Comments** – Moderator Bob Sauder talked about delegates meeting together for worshipful work, and asked the question, “What is worship?” Reflecting on the song, “Be careful little eyes, what you see,” he focused on the portion of the song which includes the words “in love.” God desires our worship. We worship best when we extend love, and we do our best worshipping throughout the week.

A5. **Minutes of the 2017 Annual Conference Assembly** – The moderator invited delegates to accept the minutes of the 2017 Annual Conference Assembly.

There was a motion to accept the minutes of the 2017 Annual Conference Assembly. M/S/C

A6. **Introduction and Blessing of New Pastors** — Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Cliff Brubaker introduced pastors who have begun new assignments in the Ohio Conference during the past year. They also invited retired pastors to come forward to welcome the new pastors and bless them during the time of prayer. Ralph Reinford noted that God is still at work in building His church. Pastors with new assignments include Jamie Rye, Millersburg Mennonite; Matt Reed, Beech Mennonite; Matthew Peterson, Midway Mennonite; Ryan Sprunger of Salem Mennonite in Kidron, licensed for special ministry as a chaplain; Cliff Brubaker, Zion Mennonite; Verle Brubaker, transitional pastor at Maple Grove Mennonite (Hartville); Corben Weaver Boshart, Zion Mennonite; Sue Short, Zion Mennonite; Rob Burdette, transitional pastor at Sharon Mennonite; and Tony Doehrmann, transitional pastor at Salem (Waldron, Mich.) Ralph led in a time of prayer for these pastors.

The regional pastors also gave recognition to several pastors who are participating in the Transitioning into Ministry Program: Sean Swanson of First Mennonite Church in Canton, Matthew Peterson of Midway Mennonite Church in Columbiana, and Corben Weaver Boshart of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold. Other pastoral milestones include ordination during this past year for Marilyn Rossiter (Summit Mennonite in Barberton) and Jeff Hochstetler (Berlin Mennonite). Ralph Reinford noted that Robin Miller retired as pastor at Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland, and Ora Shetler concluded his service as youth pastor at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church in Kidron.

A7. **Introduction of Resolutions Committee** – Bob Sauder introduced the members of the Resolutions Committee: Mary Spearman, Dan King and Paula Snyder Belousek. Dan King made several comments about the work of the committee, and reviewed instructions for the Resolutions Committee and for

submitting resolutions (found on pages 11-13 of the annual report book). The deadline for submitting proposed resolutions is 9 p.m. tonight.

A8. Introductions in Table Groups – Delegates introduced themselves to the other people in their table groups.

A9. Conference Minister Announcement – Bob Sauder made a statement about the search for a conference minister. (This statement is included at the end of these minutes.) The Leadership Team has agreed that it is not healthy for the Conference to have a half-time conference minister. Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford will take three months off for respite, and then will return after that time. He will transition to a half-time position as regional pastor on Nov. 1 or when a new conference minister is in place.

A10. Introduction and Action on Gifts Discernment Slate – Mel Hathaway, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, thanked the Gifts Discernment Ministry team members. The team still needs to fill several positions. He gave thanks to staff members Alysa Short and Judy King, and led delegates in a round of applause for those who have served during the past year. The Conference still needs more people from across the Conference to serve on the Gifts Discernment Ministry. He led the delegates in a time of prayer, and asked delegates to complete their Gifts Discernment ballots.

A11. Missional Consultant – Thomas introduced Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg and reviewed the process by which the Leadership Team has asked her to volunteer her time as a missional consultant. She is using sabbatical time for this work, and Conference has been reimbursing her for expenses.

Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, describes herself as a disturber and equipper at Zion Mennonite. She said that a missional movement has to come from the grassroots up. To promote missional living, we must find the teachable people (disciples), and develop those people. Then they work at developing others. She noted that she brought a map of Ohio to these delegate meetings. She invited delegates to plot their church on the map if they would like to be part of a missional network, as well as giving a contact name for the congregation.

A12. Credentialing Ministry Report – Andy Stoner, chair of the Credentialing Ministry Team, referred to the Credentialing Ministry report on pages 34-35 of the annual report book. The Credentialing Ministry is involved with the licensing and ordination of individuals. Their task is developing pastoral leadership that is competent, prepared and equipped. He expressed thanks to LaVonne Hartman, who is concluding her work with Credentialing Ministry. The Credentialing Ministry looks for ways for pastors to receive more training, and for ways to support pastors, along with the regional pastors.

In the past year a lot of energy has gone toward dealing with pastoral misconduct cases. The Conference has held two healthy boundaries training events, and one more is coming in April in Archbold. This training is required for pastors, but lay leaders are also encouraged to attend. The Credentialing Ministry wants to do a better job of mental and emotional health screenings for new pastors, and also provide support for any of these issues. Credentialing Ministry would like to encourage shoulder-tapping of people with gifts for ministry.

A13. Ministry Development Team Report – Assistant Moderator Thomas Dunn, chair of the Ministry Development Team (MDT), described the work of the MDT. This group works to develop ministries in the Conference. A report from the MDT is located on page 32 of the annual report book. For the past

several years MDT has awarded ministry grants for a variety of programs. The MDT also oversees resource teams which are working to meet specific needs, such as the Gathered and Sent initiatives, and the Pastor-Spouse Retreat. Thomas expressed appreciation for Alysa Short, the coordinator of volunteers, who helps make these events happen. He encouraged delegates to complete the MDT survey in their delegate packets.

A14. Missional Story – The Wheelhouse – Ginny and Larry Cress of Salem Mennonite Church in Elida talked to delegates about the Wheelhouse. In this ministry, donated bicycles are given to people who need transportation. Participants work with volunteers to refurbish the bikes. Salem Mennonite is working with Elm Street Church of the Brethren in this ministry, and many other local congregations have also given support. The Elm Street congregation is located adjacent to the bike path in Lima, making it an ideal location for this ministry.

The ministry uses 12 volunteers for three sessions each week. There is time for building a relationship with the patrons while the bicycles are being refurbished, providing an opportunity for faith conversations. Volunteers close each repair session with a time of prayer and an invitation to attend church. Each person receives a bike, helmet and bike lock.

The Wheelhouse began in March 2017 with a goal of giving out 50-100 bikes. To date, 160 adults have received a bicycle, and 45 youth bikes have been given to agencies in the Lima area. In addition, the Wheelhouse has refurbished 40 bikes for the Lima Police Department's Safety City.

As the program grew, the Wheelhouse needed on-site storage. They applied for grants, and received \$6,000 from the Ohio Conference, \$3,000 from Everence, and \$5,000 from the Church of the Brethren. Construction of the storage building is in process.

Many people came forward to help make this ministry happen. Larry Cress noted where they have seen God at work: God has provided things. Elm Street stepped forward with the initial storage space, and now land for the garage. There were offers of places to store bikes. When there was a need for funding, they set a goal of having 20 churches affiliated with the ministry, and now 22 churches are affiliated. Many volunteers have come forward to help.

There is an ongoing need for this ministry. A local survey showed that within a five-mile radius of downtown Lima, 3,000 households have no access to a vehicle. Larry Cress asked delegates to keep this ministry in their prayers.

A15. Table Talk and Open Mic – In their table groups delegates discussed two questions: “What did you hear that really got you excited? What did you hear that triggered an idea that you could use in your setting?”

Ken Sims (Table 3) – Some things that impressed his table group: These activities were hands-on, and not just a handout; regifting something that the giver may not have thought had much value; the cooperation of churches.

Jacob Myers (Table 14) – His group appreciated the building of relationships. They were impressed that the commitment and passion of one or two individuals was enough to inspire this ministry. Also, the ministry of someone who is retired is inspiring.

A16. Announcements – Bob Sauder made several announcements before closing the business session.

3-3:30 p.m. — Breaks/Displays/Snacks

3:30-4:30 — Plenary Session with Meghan Good and Marvin Lorenzana

4:45–6 p.m. — Business Session #2

A17. **Opening Song** – Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in an opening song, “I know not why God’s wondrous grace.”

A18. **Prayer** – Haroldo Nunes, pastor of Salem Mennonite Church in Wooster, led delegates in an opening prayer in Spanish.

A19. **Gifts Discernment Vote Results** – Moderator Bob Sauder reported the results of the Gifts Discernment ballot. One hundred twenty-seven delegates affirmed the whole ballot, and there were 12 additional affirmations for individual members on the ballot. Therefore, all individuals on the ballot were affirmed for service.

A20. **Introduction of Questions** — Bob Sauder introduced the questions that were presented at the cluster meetings. Looking to the future together — what does the future hold for us? We need to think about what is sustainable financially.

A21. **Table Group Discussion of Question 1** — In their table groups, delegates were asked to answer the following question: What valuable services does Conference provide to your congregation and pastor?

Open Mic —

Table 4 — Regional pastor who pastors the pastor

Table 3 — Connectedness across the entire state

Table 2 — Guidance provided in sensitive crisis conditions in the congregations

Table 1 — Support for first-time pastors and training

Table 9 — Retreats/time of rest and renewal for pastors

Table 8 — Pastor-peer groups

Table 7 — Accountability

Table 6 — Discerning a new pastor for congregations

(No Table given) — Guidelines established to help protect pastors

Table 15 — Pastor appreciation meal

Table 16 — Podcasts

Table 17 — Licensing for ministers

Table 18 — Grants for mission projects

Table 14 — Printed and online resources

Table 12 — Forums like this one, stories from around Conference

(No Table given) — Help with gaps in leadership when local congregations do not have a pastor

(No Table given) — Keeping congregations moving forward in shared direction

Table 21 — Sense of community, source of consultation for pastors

Table 20 — Assistance and counseling in times of differences of opinion in congregation

Table 19 — Relationships rather than services, theological safety net, keeping us grounded in Anabaptist teaching

(No Table given) — Transitioning for pastors/congregations

(No Table given) — Providing mediation

(No Table given) — Special emphasis programs, such as worship planning

Bob Sauder asked the table groups to rank these functions as either 3, 2 or 1, with the following meanings: 3 = can't do without it, 2 = important, and 1 = helpful. Some items may not be ranked at all if they aren't considered important by their table group.

A22. Table Group Discussion of Question 2 — In their table groups, delegates were asked to answer the following question: What are the activities of Conference that you could do without? Each group was asked to write down their answers.

A23. Missional Story — Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, a member of the collaborative ministry team at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, talked about the collaborative ministry team approach to ministry. She talked about many different pastors she has worked with who have exhibited different pastoral gifts. She reminded delegates of the APEST model of ministry found in Ephesians 4, in which people are called to be apostles, pastors, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. All these gifts are needed in a healthy church body, but no one pastor will be equally gifted in all five areas. Since most congregations can't afford to hire five full-time pastors, we need to make sure that members of the lay leadership exercise their diverse gifts.

A24. Table Discussion — Delegates discussed two questions: What did you hear that really got you excited? What did you hear that triggered an idea that you could use in your setting?

A25. Open Mic —

Marilyn Rossiter (Table 12) — She mentioned the cases of pastoral misconduct which have happened in the recent past in the Conference, and she noted that she has not heard why in one case, the pastor's credentials were suspended and not taken away in a case of sexual misconduct. Why the secrets?

Bob Sauder said that Credentialing Ministry and the Leadership Team would discuss this matter and report back to the delegates.

A26. Announcements — Bob Sauder and Alysa Short made several announcements.

6:15-7:15 p.m. — Dinner/Pastor Appreciation Meal

7:30-9:30 p.m. — Worship (Yoder Recital Hall)

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. — Worship

10-10:30 a.m. — Break/Displays/Snacks

10:30-Noon — Business Session #3

A27. Opening Song — Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in an opening song, "There's a wideness in God's mercy."

A28. Comments about Sculpture — Alysa Short talked about the sculpture titled "Theosebeia," which was displayed at the front of the meeting room. This sculpture was created by Esther K. Augsburger. The name of the sculpture means "worshiping God."

A29. Prayer — Dee Custar, pastoral team member at Salem Mennonite in Waldron, Michigan, led delegates in an opening prayer.

A30. Introduction of Spending Plan — Melanie Miller and Dean Falb of the Stewardship Ministry Team introduced the proposed Conference spending plan for 2018-19. They noted that the spending plan includes four expense categories: operations, seminars and retreats, other congregational services, and denominational support. Funding sources include congregations, individuals/other, and capital gains. In this current fiscal year, giving has exceeded projections, which is a blessing. The denominational support is based on a tithe amount.

Melanie and Dean shared information on congregational giving over the past two years, noting that 28 congregations have increased their giving this year compared to last year. At the end of January, the Capital Funds balance was \$630,570.

Open Mic —

Haroldo Nunes — What is the interest rate we are getting on our investments? Answer: Most funds are in securities and in bonds. The interest earned was about 5 percent.

Paula Snyder Belousek — How many congregations are currently not members of Mennonite Church USA? Melanie Miller noted that if congregations say that they don't want their funds to go to Mennonite Church USA, the Conference follows their wishes. Currently two congregations are not giving to Mennonite Church USA.

Paula Snyder Belousek — Are some congregations not giving to Ohio Conference as a message regarding Mennonite Church USA? This is a question for delegates to consider.

A31. Table Discussion — Delegates discussed the financial report and spending plan presentation in their table groups.

Open Mic —

Cliff Linder (Beech) — Who is going to take over Ralph Reinford’s regional pastor work when he goes to half time status? Answer: The Leadership Team will be working with the regional pastors to make sure that their work does not exceed half time.

(No name given) — It appears that the budget does not include any funding for youth programs.

Evan Wehr (Midway) — He questioned why the spending plan calls for \$3,000 in printing expenses, when only \$9 has been spent on printing this year. Answer: Much of the spending for this line item is for ACA printing costs, such as report books, and those expenses have not been accounted for yet for this fiscal year.

A32. **“Gathered” Initiative** — Myron Weaver, pastor of Berlin Mennonite Church, told delegates about the “Gathered” initiative. In these meetings, pastors and leaders have gathered to tend to the core of what it means to be a conference together — learning from each other and taking what we’ve learned and applying it to our lives. Myron has been on the committee planning these meetings. Other members include Rod Miller, Dan Hooley, and Regional Pastor Cliff Brubaker. Since Cliff is concluding his work with this committee, they are looking for additional committee members.

During the past year, the Gathered meetings have had several presenters, including David Boshart, David Miller and Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg. The group has spent time worshipping together as pastors and leaders, meeting together as a whole conference instead of meeting in regional gatherings in the west and east. One of the things Myron has appreciated about these meetings is getting to know new pastors in the Conference who are very Anabaptist even though they have not grown up in the Anabaptist tradition. It is life-giving for him to learn from these young pastors.

Myron noted that he has been a part of the Ohio Conference for about nine years. Some Conference events during those past nine years have been extremely painful, but in the past few years the experience has shifted for him. He believes that part of the struggle was simply because we did not know each other. We can work together in spite of our differences, and we can make a difference in the world in spite of difficulties. The pastors plan to continue to gather in this coming year to learn from each other and from input persons.

A33. **“Sent” Initiative** — Jacob Dodson, pastor of Wooster Mennonite, talked about the “Sent” initiative. This journey has been humbling and stretching for him. He acknowledged that some of this missional language has been hard to work with, but God is enabling and empowering us. He quoted Hans Denck, who said, “The measure is Christ who no else can know unless they follow him, and no one can follow him unless they know him.” We value the discipleship process.

Jacob invited forward the rest of the Missional Planning Team — Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, Joel Shenk, Paula Snyder Belousek, and Jamie Rye.

Jacob noted that the Conference’s missional emphasis includes a focus on partnering with God in what God is already doing. There is a call to disciple others, even those who have not yet been converted. Several congregations are taking part in the Missional Discipleship Initiative offered by Mennonite Mission Network. The Missional Planning Team would like to have other congregations take part in this discipling process, and they will be contacting other congregations to see if they have interest.

Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg addressed questions she has gotten since her presentation yesterday. All are called to their own gift – apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher. If congregations want their pastors to remain healthy for a long period of time, the pastors need to find out their calling so that they can really thrive. The congregation can fill in the gaps in the areas where the pastor is not as gifted. We all have powerful gifts, and they should be used.

Jessica also talked more about the plan to form a Missional Network. The map of Ohio is now by the door, and she is asking those who are interested in participating to indicate their interest by marking their congregation on the map and leaving their contact information. Jessica would like to establish regular times for meeting. She wants to cultivate a language of experiment and risk, to encourage people to try things out, even if there are failures. She would also like to help people learn through “missional labs,” that is experiencing missional programs already in place such as the Wheelhouse in Lima. She also noted that church planting is a natural by-product of missional work. It is planting community.

A34. **“The Voice”** — Bill Seymour and Darrin Snyder Belousek spoke to delegates about the Ohio Conference task force called “The Voice.” They serve on this task force with Erin Dye. They have been asked to articulate the vision of Ohio Conference to the rest of Mennonite Church USA and to help congregations to communicate with denominational agencies.

As part of their work with this task force, Bill and Darrin served as delegates to the 2017 Mennonite Church USA Assembly in Orlando, participating in the Future Church Summit. Last year they asked for input from people in the Conference so that they can represent the Conference more clearly, and they repeated that invitation to contact them with questions and concerns.

They reported on one item which came to them in July 2016. Tedrow Mennonite Church asked a question about the relationship between Mennonite Education Agency (MEA), the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, and the individual colleges and seminaries. Tedrow was interested in issues of accountability and things that the educational institutions are teaching. The task force asked questions of the colleges and seminaries, and they relayed the responses received to Tedrow. The task force will make the document available to all. Anyone interested should contact Darrin or Tedrow Mennonite Church to get a copy.

They reported one unresolved issue. Darrin made four attempts to communicate with MEA but got no response from MEA. However, last summer when Bill went to Albania, he met Elaine Moyer, an MEA employee, at Lezha Academic Center. Bill and Darrin then met with Elaine at the denominational convention in Orlando. She has communicated with her supervisor, but as yet there is still no official response from MEA.

In response to this report, Lynette Bontrager, an Ohio Conference delegate who is also a member of the MEA Board, said that the Board will be meeting next week. She promised to take the message to MEA and to help generate a response.

A35. **Announcement and Prayer** — Cliff Brubaker announced that Cheryl Vanatsky, pastor of Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Spartansburg, Pa., was very ill, and that Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford was on the way to the hospital with her. Cliff led the delegates in prayer for Cheryl.

A36. **Missional Story** – Jared Chase of Sharon Mennonite Church told the story of the congregation’s summer work camp. The church’s youth group had done mission trips in the past. The first work camp experience was with Jackson Area Ministries. In debriefing after that experience, they realized that they could do something similar in their own location. Three years ago they held the first work camp in Plain City. They are now in the planning stages for the fourth year of work camp. Planners register students and volunteers, do fundraising, do site coordination, identify a devotional theme, and plan meals. The work camp week begins on Sunday afternoon with orientation. Monday through Thursday the students do acts of service during the day, followed by devotional times at night led by the students. On Thursday night they meet together to talk about what they have learned, and on Friday the entire group tours all the work sites. Sharon Mennonite Church would like to share this idea with others or have others partner with them.

A37. **Table Discussion** – Delegates discussed two questions regarding Jared’s presentation: What did you hear that really got you excited? What did you hear that triggered an idea that you could use in your setting?

A38. **Announcements** – Bob Sauder and Alysa Short made several announcements. Bob Sauder also announced that there are 207 participants at this year’s Annual Conference Assembly, including representatives from 41 congregations. The offering on Friday night totaled \$2,150.83.

Noon-1 p.m. — Lunch

1-2 p.m. — Workshops

2:15-4 p.m. — Business Session #4

A39. **Opening Song** — Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in an opening song, “For the healing of the nations.”

A40. **Credentialing Ministry** – Andy Stoner and Vickie Yoder of Credentialing Ministry addressed the delegates. Andy Stoner shared the following official statement from the Credentialing Ministry:

In the interest of bringing healing to persons and congregations who have been deeply wounded by sexual misconduct, we have consulted with Conference and denominational persons, and have decided to be more specific regarding the cases mentioned in our report. As Credentialing Ministry Team, we followed MC USA guidelines in responding to these situations this past year.

1. Sexual misconduct charge against Rick Stoner, Sharon Mennonite Church, Plain City, Ohio. His credential has been terminated, following his choice **not** to participate in a redemptive process.
2. Sexual misconduct charge against Ned Wyse, Salem Mennonite Church, Waldron, Michigan. His credential has been suspended. Ned is participating in an ongoing process, intended to be redemptive, and restorative, and healing for all.

We invite you to be praying for these congregations, because when this sin of crossing healthy sexual boundaries occurs, its pain and impact is felt by **everyone** in the congregation, and the healing process is long and difficult.

Thanks also for continuing to remember us, the Credentialing Ministry Team, in prayer as we respond to these very complicated and challenging incidents in the Conference.

Vickie Yoder then led the delegates in prayer.

A41. Resolution in Appreciation of Regional Pastors — Paula Snyder Belousek of the Resolutions Committee shared a proposed resolution for consideration:

Resolution: We the delegates of Ohio Mennonite Conference wish to convey our deepest respect and appreciation to Ralph Reinford and Cliff Brubaker for faithfully and gracefully carrying heavy responsibilities for the good of the Conference. We acknowledge that we have not always appreciated nor affirmed them nor recognized the burdens they have carried on our behalf. We pledge our continued prayers and support to them during the transitions to come. We ask God to bless and reward these two servants with abundant peace and joy. — M/S/C

In addition to adopting the resolution, the delegates gave the regional pastors a round of applause.

A42. Sending and Blessing of Departing Congregations – Before introducing the next business item, Cliff Brubaker gave a brief update on Cheryl Vanatsky's condition. She is still in the emergency room at a local hospital. Medical staff have ruled out several possible causes for her symptoms.

Two congregations are leaving the Ohio Conference this year. Leetonia Mennonite Church voted to leave the Ohio Conference and Mennonite Church USA on Nov. 30. The congregation joined the Evana Network in August 2017.

Lima Mennonite Church has been a dual-conference congregation with membership in both Central District Conference and the Ohio Conference. The congregation has decided to affiliate solely with Central District Conference. Emily Hedrick, pastor at Lima, read a statement regarding this decision:

Lima Mennonite Church would like to thank Ohio Conference for all the support you've given us over the years. In particular, with several pastoral appointments, leadership as we processed our welcoming statement, and our decision about our dual-conference affiliation. We experienced graciousness from you regarding our timeline for decision making, and that strengthened our process. We've reached a point in our ministry as a congregation where being dual conference has become too much for our small church to carry. Efforts by Ohio Conference to clarify pastors' stance on sexuality, coupled with our calling of a new pastor in 2016, caused some members in our congregation to no longer feel welcome in the Conference. This inspired a year-long process to discern our conference affiliation. We received helpful support from Ohio Conference and Central District Conference during this process, and ultimately decided to remain solely in Central District Conference. We hope to maintain an informal friendship with you, even as we formally say goodbye. May God bless all of us as we pursue God's healing and hope for our world.

Emily followed the congregation's official statement with some comments of her own, noting that she has had really positive experiences with the Ohio Conference and has made many friends in the Conference.

Cliff commended the Lima congregation's thoughtfulness in their processing of this decision. He also led the delegates in a prayer for these two congregations.

There was a motion to release Leetonia Mennonite Church and Lima Mennonite Church from membership in the Ohio Conference. M/S/P

A43. **Spending Plan Vote** — Melanie Miller, co-chair of the Stewardship Ministry, referred to comments made by Jared Chase in which he talked about trying new and different ideas. The Stewardship Ministry has been brainstorming ways to save money for the Conference. The Stewardship Ministry is looking for new ideas for dealing with the expenses of the Conference office. They want to put together a feasibility study group to look at Conference office expenses and technology use. Anyone interested in participating in this group should contact a member of the Stewardship Ministry.

The delegates voted on the spending plan by paper ballot. Vote results were as follows: Yes- 127, No – 0. The 2018-19 spending plan was approved.

A44. **Table Discussion** — Bob Sauder said that he would send a report of the responses to questions 1 and 2 to delegates via email. Delegates were asked to discuss this question: "What would you like to see Conference provide/do that we aren't currently doing?"

Open Mic —

No name given — Resourcing and funding for youth programs, emphasizing relationship of non-delegates to the Conference

Table 17 — Young adult retreat or youth retreat, missional training on a weekend

Regina Wenger (Table 3) — Streaming access using technology for cluster meetings

Haroldo Nunes (Table 17) — Reports online or via PDF

Hank Rossiter (Table 6) — Conference grappling with the next phase — possibly house churches, smaller church plants

Jamie Rye — Focus on youth/youth programming, mentor programming, getting a group together around environmental concerns

A45. **Mennonite Church USA** — Terry Shue, director of leadership development from Mennonite Church USA, referred to his history with the Ohio Conference. He said church life today is a mess, but a glorious mess in the light of resurrection hope. We can see people of God planting seeds of hope in the world, and beauty is sprouted. He hears these stories of hope across the land, not just in Ohio Conference.

Mennonite Church USA is going through a two-year process of looking at our identity and articulating our values. The denomination is seeking to define what is really at our core, using the Journey Forward process. The process includes a one-page document titled "Renewed Commitments," and the denomination is working on a Bible study guide related to these values. When the study guide is available, he encourages all congregations to participate in this Bible study.

He noted that more than half of the things which delegates listed yesterday as valuable things they receive from the Ohio Conference are actually products of national and conference staff collaboration. One thing the denomination has been focusing on recently includes lobbying for healthy immigration

reform. Over the last year the denominational staff have given significant time and energy toward creating healthy boundaries for pastors and congregations. Whenever sexual boundaries are crossed by credentialed ministers, it is always the responsibility of the pastor to prevent it and to stop it. The denomination is training and putting together a network of investigators of sexual misconduct.

Terry asked for prayers as the Constituency Leaders Council and Executive Board meet in April for a one-day conversation. There are staffing transitions coming in Mennonite Church USA. Glen Guyton will be the new executive director, succeeding Ervin Stutzman. Nancy Kauffman is retiring from her position as denominational minister. In addition, Terry is resigning from Mennonite Church USA after eight years as director of leadership development.

Bob Sauder invited delegates to give Terry a round of applause for all his work in Ohio Conference and Mennonite Church USA.

A46. Mennonite Mission Network — Karla Minter, church relations representative for Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), noted that she first came to an Ohio Conference gathering a few years ago at Martins Creek Mennonite Church. It is a beautiful thing to see God working in Ohio Conference. She reminded delegates about ACA at Central Mennonite Church in Archbold in 2016. That gathering was preceded by the first missional conference with speakers Brad Brisco and Lance Ford. Next came ACA at Central Christian School and the second missional conference with Debra and Alan Hirsch. Now this year at Bluffton University the missional conference features speakers related to the denomination, Marvin Lorenzana and Meghan Good. There is energy here at this gathering. She sees how God is moving among us in the Ohio Conference. Ohio Conference gave nearly \$500,00 to MMN last year. The development of the Missional Discipleship Network with Marvin Lorenzana was supported by Ohio Conference giving to MMN. Karla encouraged delegates to consider attending the SENT 2018 church planting conference which will be held May 4-6 in Chicago. She also highlighted MMN resources which are available, including the *Missio Dei* series of booklets.

A47. Central Christian – Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi has been superintendent of Central Christian School in Kidron since August. Coming back to Ohio after many years of living internationally, she finds it exciting to hear about mission happening here. The Anabaptist way of following Jesus is a gift to be shared, not a difference to be downplayed. Central Christian can model proactive peacebuilding. The centrality of Jesus is the reason for relationships with students and for restorative discipline processes. She appreciated the story of the Wheelhouse, in which other congregations have joined in the vision for this mission. Similarly, Christian School Corporation has now changed its constitution to allow other congregations which are not members of the Ohio Conference to become part of its corporation. These constitutional changes happened during the fall of 2017 after discussion with the Ohio Conference. Each of these congregations must affirm the Anabaptist documents which are part of the constitution.

Central Christian appreciates collaboration with the Ohio Conference. School leaders have been meeting with Ohio Conference leaders since August. Ohio Conference members have led chapels at Central, and Central is looking forward to hosting ACA in the future. The school's board is working on a new strategic plan. They have developed identity, vision and mission statements.

A48. Camp Luz – Andrew Michaels, director of Camp Luz, said that there is a fresh breeze blowing in the Ohio Conference. In the past few years, Camp Luz has replaced roofs and windows and doors, as well as putting siding on buildings. They have built a new garage, installed air conditioning in cabins, built a

pool, built a new wastewater plant, and reinforced a dam. They also have been updating manuals for the last eight months.

God is at work and has called us to share Christ and help people grow in their faith. There are retreats coming up in April, and summer camp is coming soon. The camp had 400 campers last year. Andrew asked for help in finding staff for this summer. Next February the camp will host both junior high and senior high retreats. He asked for prayer during the summer camp season. He mentioned that the camp has a campership fund to assist campers with financial needs. This year the campership fund has more funds than usual, and he encouraged delegates to let potential campers know about this opportunity.

A49. Brazo en Brazo – Barb Martin of Salem Mennonite Church in Elida talked to delegates about Brazo en Brazo (Arm in Arm). Brazo en Brazo was started in 2004 by Paul and Ann Conrad. Five local Mennonite congregations support this mission. Brazo en Brazo is blessed by financial support from the Ohio Conference. It is an outreach to Spanish-speaking people in the Lima area, providing social and spiritual support. Brazo en Brazo's staff member, Marti Meza, provides social work support. Worship services are at Lima Mennonite Church.

A50. Open Arms Hispanic Ministry – Haroldo Nunes, executive director of Open Arms, thanked the Ohio Conference for financial support and moral support. The five-church network in Wayne County has also supported Open Arms. He asked for prayer for Paul and Ann Conrad, the founders of Brazo en Brazo, because they have had health problems.

The main goal of Open Arms is to welcome Hispanics to the community. We need relationships to combat fear and misinformation. We need to advocate for this community. He gave thanks to Raul and Vanita Tadeo and his wife, Esmirna, for all their work with Open Arms. Open Arms is still doing a lot of work with translation and providing transportation, but now they are also working with the immigration issue. Immigrants are following a long tradition of people coming to the country. How can we welcome these people? These people are bringing good things to our community. The church needs to wake up!

He noted that this year is the 15th year for the Hispanic retreat at Camp Luz. He thanked Open Arms board members Dan King and Ryan Troyer, as well as David Hargrave, who pastors with him at Salem Mennonite Church in Wooster. He also mentioned the Tio/Tia program for Hispanic students. More volunteers are needed for this program.

A51. Update on Cheryl Vanatsky — Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford reported on Cheryl Vanatsky. She was checked at the hospital, and she is able to go home. She gave thanks for the delegates' prayers.

A52. Open Mic —

Haroldo Nunes — He expressed appreciation for the volunteers who give time to the mission of the Ohio Conference.

A53. Announcements — Alysa Short and Bob Sauder made several announcements, including an announcement about the upcoming Pastors' Wives Retreat.

A54. Drawing for Delegate Incentives — Laura Mast was the winner of the gift basket provided by Mennonite Mutual. There also was a drawing for gift baskets for individuals who turned in the delegate checklist. Melissa Nofziger, Beverly Armstrong, Danae King, and Myron Ramseyer received these gift baskets.

A55. **Closing Remarks** — Moderator Bob Sauder thanked the delegates for attending ACA and participating in delegate sessions.

A56. **Closing Song** – Marilyn Rossiter led delegates in a closing song, “Renew Your Church.”

A57. **Closing Prayer** – Corben Weaver Boshart gave a closing prayer.

Recorded by Ann Leaman

Conference Minister Announcement

After many hours spent discussing the conference minister position and a very comprehensive search process, the Search Committee and the Leadership Team are in agreement that hiring someone at a half-time capacity is not a healthy thing for any candidate or the Conference at this time.

We apologize to the Conference staff and to those of you who have counseled us from the beginning that half-time was not a good idea. The plus side is that this discussion has helped us to focus on what it is we really expect from this position and where we as a Conference hope to direct our efforts.

I feel we did a good job of defining the duties of what the conference minister has done in the past. And we did a fair job of prioritizing those functions that were most important and things that could be left undone if and when time became a factor. At the same time, we added responsibilities that we felt were important in moving the Conference in the direction of becoming more mission-oriented.

I will say that I pushed the hardest to keep moving forward with the half-time position. My goal was to alleviate the extra burden and stress that we had put on the staff. In retrospect, I did not realize that in making this a half-time position, we would in effect be expecting the present staff to pick up the pieces that were not covered, increasing their workload and stress rather than decreasing it.

I apologize for that miscalculation. My sincerest hope was that I would be introducing a new conference minister at these meetings and that we could spend the next two years continuing to watch the Conference become a vital instrument in God’s Kingdom work.

So, where do we go from here? Ralph Reinford has faithfully picked up many of the duties of the conference minister along with his full-time regional pastor’s role for the past two years. But in the process, he has been stretched in unhealthy ways. In January, the Leadership Team offered Ralph a three-month leave with no strings attached. Ralph returned a counter-proposal to the Leadership Team in February. His proposal was to take the months of May – July for respite and regrouping. On his return he will continue his present duties until a conference minister is hired or until Nov. 1 when he will reduce his time to .5 FTE and resume only his regional pastor responsibilities. Leadership Team has committed to working with Ralph and Cliff Brubaker to determine ways in which we can keep their workload at that level.

Leadership Team has accepted this very gracious offer. We have asked the search group to reopen the search for a full-time conference minister with skills as a transformational leader who will equip us for

navigating the opportunities and challenges for the church today. Interest in Anabaptism is rising, and Ohio Conference wants a conference minister to help us extend our witness.

The Leadership Team is committed to continuing to look for ways we can adjust staff responsibilities and workloads that will allow us to create what we believe will be an effective and sustainable job description for the conference minister. At the same time, we will do our best to continue to offer our congregations the support they need and maintain the energy and momentum that the Gathered and Sent initiatives have brought to the Conference.

Thank you for your prayers and counsel, and we ask you to continue to support us in the coming months as we move forward in the process of finding a conference minister.

— Bob Sauder, Moderator