

OHIO MENNONITE EVANGEL

News & Views of Ohio Conference

NOV/DEC 2020



ohiomennoniteconference.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 2 Editorial
- Abuse prevention
- 4 Conference minister musings
- 6 Resource corner
- 7 Credentialing Ministry takes action regarding sexual misconduct
- 8 About people
- 10 Back page briefings

Regional gatherings focus on mission statement, congregational sharing

By Dick Barrett
Conference Minister

On Oct. 20, 22, 27 and 29 Ohio Conference held four regional fall gatherings for delegates to Annual Conference Assembly. Delegates learned about a proposed new mission statement for the Conference, heard more about the upcoming Annual Conference Assem-

bly, and shared with one another about their congregations' experiences dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, all four gatherings were held virtually via Zoom. We had a total of 101 attendees representing 30 congregations. Conference Moderator Lynn Miller served as host for the four meetings. Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Tony Doehrmann



Regional
Gatherings

read the opening scripture, offered prayer and led the congregational sharing time.

Continued on page 3

Congregations asked to identify individuals with gifts for pastoral ministry

Ohio Conference needs your help

For a variety of reasons, the number of men and women who are graduating from seminaries and pursuing pastoral ministry positions has been decreasing. This trend has resulted in fewer candidates for pastoral openings throughout the Ohio Conference.

The Leadership Development Resource Team is currently exploring both new and traditional ways of identifying those whom God may be calling into pastoral ministry. There was a time in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition when pastors were called from within their congrega-



Continued on page 6



EDITORIAL

How can we best support our pastors?

Leaders matter. But as the Leadership Development Resource Team notes in the article on page 1, it has become increasingly difficult to find pastoral leaders for our congregations in the Ohio Conference. Consequently, the resource team is urging churches to identify people with gifts for pastoral ministry.

Identifying potential new leaders is vital, but I believe it is just as vital for our

congregations to care for the pastoral leaders they already have. Recently, the Ohio Conference Leadership Team and Ministry Development Team agreed to offer \$250 Pastor Wellness Grants to Ohio Conference congregations. These grants are specifically designed to help congregations offer a Sunday off for their pastors, many of whom have been facing very challenging circum-



stances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Has your congregation taken advantage of this grant? If not, why not learn more about the grant at <http://bit.ly/PastorWellnessGrant>?

— ahl

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Editor: Ann H. Leaman

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Send subscription information and email address changes to the editor at ohioevangel@gmail.com.

Video training focuses on abuse prevention

The Dove's Nest, an organization committed to empowering faith communities to keep children and youth safe from abuse in their churches, homes and communities, has a new video resource available.

This new safety and abuse prevention training video for adult volunteers is now available to churches for a one-time fee of \$75.

In 38 minutes, the video covers these topics:

- Child abuse and Jesus' message regarding safety for children
- Why and how to implement a child protection policy
- An overview of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum
- Reporting suspected abuse
- Tech safety and social media, as well as child-on-child perpetration

- Consent and safe touch

You can see a one-minute preview of the training on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/DovesNestTrainingVideo>.

For more information and instructions on how to purchase a copy of this video, please see <https://dovesnest.net/NEW-38-Minute-Training-Video-Available>. ■

Personnel of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

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Regional gatherings Continued from page 1



PROPOSED MISSION STATEMENT

Conference Minister Dick Barrett shared a proposed new Conference mission statement that the Leadership and Pastoral Teams have been working on over the past several months. We have now received feedback from our pastors and delegates. The new mission statement reflects both God's Greatest Commandments (Mark 12:29-31) and Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), as well as Conference's *Gathered and Sent* initiative where we believe God has led us over the past several years and where he is leading us into the future. The proposed new mission statement reads as follows:

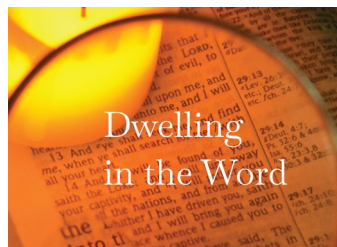
The Mission of Ohio Conference is to gather, equip and send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out God's Greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission.

The possible tagline for Conference would be *Gather, Equip and Send*, and for our congregations and members, *Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples*. For

those who might not have been able to attend one of the regional meetings, we welcome your feedback about this proposed mission statement. Please contact the conference minister, one of the regional pastors or anyone from the Leadership Team if you have concerns or affirmations regarding the statement. (Email addresses for Leadership Team members can be found at the bottom of page 2 under the heading "Personnel of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA.")

LOOKING FORWARD TO ACA

Ohio Conference will hold a spring Missional Conference during the evenings of March 4 and 5 and Annual Conference Assembly (ACA) on Saturday, March 6. In preparation for these events, a member of the Missional Resource Team led each of the gatherings in a Dwelling in the Word time focusing on John 1:46 and 1 Peter 3:15-16a. There were times for small group discussion in breakout rooms and a time for larger group responses.



The intent of this scripture and discussion time was to start us thinking about what living missionally looks like for rural churches, as well as some of

the unique challenges of missional living in a rural context. The speaker for the missional gathering and ACA will be Brad Roth, pastor at West Zion Mennonite Church in Moundridge, Kansas. In 2017 Herald Press released his book, *God's Country: Faith, Hope and the Future of the Rural Church*.

CONGREGATIONAL SHARING

The regional pastors led the congregational sharing time with one person from each congregation answering the following two questions:

1. What has been the greatest challenge for your congregation during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Where have you seen God at work in your congregation during the pandemic?

Many of the congregations shared about the same challenges. Here were some common themes:

- the need to adapt to not meeting in person
- learning new technology
- having to make decisions whether to meet and/or how to meet
- the diversity that exists in many of our congregations on safety vs. risk

Many delegates shared about how the political climate and divisiveness that exists in our nation has influenced our church members and attendees.

Continued on page 5

CONFERENCE MINISTER MUSINGS

Unity in a divisive world

By Dick Barrett
Conference Minister

By the time you read this column in the *Evangel*, the United States will have voted to elect or re-elect its next president. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this we will know who won. It seems like each election cycle creates more and more division in our country. The United States is divided in so many ways: politically, how to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, how to respond to the disproportionate deaths of black people at the hands of police officers, how to respond to increased violence in its cities, how best to provide affordable health care for all its citizens, and on and on and on. The United States is a divided country. Perhaps even its name, the “United States,” might be one of the biggest oxymorons that exists today.

However, my concern is not the current level of divisiveness in the United States of America. My concern is the level of divisiveness in the Church of Jesus Christ. In many ways, the people in our churches don’t look that different than those outside the church. That should

cause us to take notice, since God has always desired unity among his people. In one of the shortest Psalms in the Bible we find David’s song for unity:

How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down Aaron’s beard,

down on the collar of his robe.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. — Psalm 133 (NIV)

Where does God bestow his blessings and life forevermore? Where his people live together in unity!

Jesus prayed a similar prayer. Just prior to his great priestly prayer that he prayed on the last night of his life here on earth, Jesus said, “*I have told you these [many] things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). Then Jesus prays his longest prayer recorded in Scripture, which contains these words (bold emphasis mine):

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them **may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.*

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the



glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one** – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought together in **complete unity**. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” — John 17:20-23

Unity is not the same as uniformity. Unity is the coming together in the midst of diversity for a common mission and purpose. It involves exchanging our will for Christ’s will. Jesus seemed to believe that unity was necessary if the world was going to know him. We become united in the Church when we acknowledge that Jesus himself is our common mission and purpose. Through repentance (turning from our own selfish wills and ways towards God’s will and ways) and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we become united as one body in Christ with God as our Father, and we as brothers and sisters with Jesus. When

Continued on page 5

“Unity is not the same as uniformity. Unity is the coming together in the midst of diversity for a common mission and purpose.”

Musings Continued from page 4

we cultivate unity in the body of Christ, we acknowledge that Jesus is in control and that his grace is sufficient to cover our differences.

As we enter into this special time of the year when we celebrate Thanksgiving and the first Christmas, may we seek God's heart and ask Him to draw His Church together as one, so that the world will believe in the One that God has sent to unite us.

In closing, I would like to share this prayer* from Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.



Prayer for Peace
Inspired by the Roman Missal

O God, author and lover of peace,
You strengthen the weak,
comfort the afflicted,

and accompany all who seek to care for your people.
Send your spirit upon us all:
a spirit of peace and truth,
a spirit of justice and right.
Bring together your flock,
scattered now in so many different ways.
May we find in you the reason for our unity
and the hope for our peace.
Look with love and compassion on your suffering Church.
And may we, your children,
truly become the peacemakers you have called us to be.
Amen.

*Used with permission ■

Regional gatherings Continued from page 3

In answer to the second question, all the congregations shared how they have seen God at work during this time. A variety of answers were shared:

- creativity in connecting with the people from their congregation in both old and new ways
- people from outside their congregation participating in their virtual services
- increased financial generosity
- new missional engagement with their community (i.e. weekly meals)

Some congregations reported the hiring of new pastoral staff.

Many people expressed both appreciation and concern for their pastors and other church leaders — appreciation for how they have adapted and ministered during this time, and concern for their health and stamina the longer the pandemic goes on.

We want to thank all the pastors and delegates for taking the time to participate in Ohio Conference's fall regional meetings.



Editor's note: Recordings of three of the fall regional meetings are available for viewing. To get links to the recordings, please visit the Ohio Conference website: <http://bit.ly/OCFall2020Recordings>. ■

“Many people expressed both appreciation and concern for their pastors and other church leaders...”

Identifying leaders

Continued from page 1

tions. Even when these individuals were not called to serve in their home congregation, many churches still played an important role in identifying, mentoring, and sending out pastoral leaders.

Over the next six months we are inviting each of our congregations to try to identify two or three individuals who they believe have the gifts for pastoral ministry. These persons might be a high school youth, or an adult of any age. There are programs available, both traditional and non-traditional,

for people of all ages to explore and test their call to ministry. Please contact one of the members of the Leadership Development Resource Team (listed below) with the names of the people you have been able to identify.

Leadership Development Resource Team

Rebecca Kauffman, Pastor, Bethel Mennonite Church, rebecca@bethelchurchwl.org

Joel Shenk, Pastor, Toledo Mennonite Church, joelshenk@gmail.com

Danae King, ministry student and member of Orrville Mennonite Church, danaeking@gmail.com

Miriam Zehr, Associate Pastor, Oak Grove, Smithville, ogpastor.miriam@gmail.com

Shawn Hilliard, Pastor, Martins Mennonite Church, shawn.e.hilliard@gmail.com

Tony Doebrmann, Regional Pastor – West, ocrpwest@gmail.com

Dick Barrett, Ohio Conference Minister, ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com ■

RESOURCE CORNER

MC USA, Together in Worship offer free resources

By Ann Leaman
Ohio Conference
Resource Advocate

This month I would like to highlight free worship resources, both for corporate worship and for worship at home.

TOGETHER IN WORSHIP

Are you looking for Anabaptist worship resources? Together in Worship

(togetherinworship.net) is a new website containing a wide variety of free

worship resources. A partnership with CommonWord, Together in Worship is a collection of free Anabaptist digital



worship materials. More than 1,500 resources are available so far.

Resource categories include words for worship, music, video, visual art, and teaching. Together in Worship is also a platform for individuals and communities to create and contribute resources. Submissions are welcome. See <https://togetherinworship.net/Content/tiw-submissions> for details.

ADVENT AT HOME

In a time when many people are spending more time at home due to COVID-19, Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) is again offering an Advent at Home devotional guide.

MC USA's 2020 Advent at Home devotional, "We Wait for Jesus," is now available for [free download](#). The annual guide for home-based worship provides daily and weekly scripture readings, prayers and activities for individuals and families observing the season of anticipation leading to the birth of Jesus.

"We Wait for Jesus" focuses on the traditional Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love. The devotional provides resources for seven weeks, beginning with the first Sunday of Advent through Epiphany (Nov. 29, 2020-Jan. 6, 2021). The guide leads worshippers through the biblical account of

Continued on page 7

Credentialing Ministry takes action in sexual misconduct case

From Conference Minister Dick Barrett

On June 19, 2020, Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA received a complaint of alleged sexual misconduct on the part of Jeffery L. Kauffman which occurred during the time that he was serving as one of the pastors of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio. Jeff served at Zion Mennonite Church from 2011 to 2016. He has not served in pastoral ministry since then, but Ohio Conference continued to hold his ordination credentials in an “inactive” status.

The allegation was that Jeff had been involved in a sexual relationship with an adult female member while he was serving as a pastor of the Zion congregation. Upon receiving the complaint, an investigation was initiated following Mennonite Church USA’s *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure*. A team of three unbiased and experienced investigators was given the responsibility of investigating the allegation and reporting their findings to the Ohio Conference Credentialing Ministry Team. After reviewing evidence and interviewing Jeff,

the investigative team determined that he had engaged in pastoral sexual misconduct.

On July 22, 2020, the Credentialing Ministry Team convened, reviewed the report and filed a charge of Ministerial Sexual Misconduct against Jeff Kauffman. On Aug. 3, 2020, the Credentialing Ministry Team received a response from him stating that he agreed with the charge. Jeff was fully cooperative in the investigative process and never denied the allegation. Jeff made a formal request to relinquish his ministerial credentials.

Based on the investigative team’s findings and upon Jeff Kauffman’s own admission to the misconduct, on Aug. 6, 2020, the Ohio Conference Credentialing Ministry Team made the decision to terminate Jeff’s ordination credentials due to pastoral sexual misconduct.

Ohio Conference publicly announces all newly credentialed leaders and any changes in credential status for currently credentialed leaders. We believe that being appropriately open and transparent increases accountability for credentialed

leaders, congregations and the Conference. This practice also ensures that victims and survivors of ministerial sexual misconduct feel free to report such incidents and are empowered on their healing journey. Ohio Conference will do its best to walk alongside all those who have been impacted.

Ohio Conference holds all pastors to a high standard of ethical conduct. We have policies, procedures and training for all of our active credentialed ministers that promote safe and ethical interactions between the ministers and participants in their faith community. There is a link at the bottom of our home page at www.ohiomennoniteconference.org regarding reporting misconduct and for accessing Mennonite Church USA’s *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures*.

It is our prayer that all those who have been affected by this misconduct and misconduct similar to this will be able to experience the justice, grace, mercy, love, and healing of Jesus Christ. ■

Resource corner

Continued from page 6

Jesus’ birth, from the words of the prophets to the arrival of the Magi.

According to Shana Peachey Boshart, MC USA denominational minister for Faith Formation, the 2020 Advent at

Home devotional is designed to be easy to use and accessible to people of all ages. A flexible menu of activities allows worshippers to choose those that are best suited for their household.

This year’s devotional was written by Talashia Keim Yoder, pastor of Christian Formation at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana. To download this resource, go to <http://bit.ly/2020AdventatHome>. ■

ABOUT PEOPLE

Pastoral notes

Conference Minister Dick Barrett (left) offered a blessing during the worship service at Berlin Mennonite Church on Sept. 27, marking the installation of Jeff Hochstetler as lead pastor for the congregation. Also pictured are Jeff's wife, Kelsey, and their three daughters.



On Sept. 27 Jeff Hochstetler was installed as the lead pastor at Berlin Mennonite Church. Jeff's spiritual director, Rev. Dr. Graham Standish of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, delivered the message, titled "When the Spirit Calls," based on Acts 16:6-10.

The theme for the service was "Winds of Change." The search

committee, an elder, and the entire congregation participated in a litany of installation. Conference Minister Dick Barrett shared a few words and offered the installation blessing. Jeff and his wife, Kelsey, were presented with a blanket as a reminder that God covers them during

the winds and storms of life, a light as a reminder that God's Holy Spirit will fill them, strengthen them and encourage them, and a future copy of the new *Voices Together* hymnal as a reminder that Jeff is called to use the wind over his vocal chords as a voice of praise, proclamation, reconciliation, and a champion for justice and peace.

There were many guests and family members present to celebrate the special occasion, which took place outside in beautiful weather with a strong wind as a witness of God's presence. Before becoming lead pastor at Berlin Mennonite, Jeff previously served the congregation as the family life pastor, beginning in 2014. ■

Regional Pastor Tony Doehrmann speaks to the congregation at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty during the installation service for Alex Dye, lead pastor, and Andy Stoner, congregational life pastor. The outdoor installation service was held Oct. 11.



Alex Dye and Andy Stoner were officially installed as pastors at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty during an outdoor worship service on Sunday, Oct. 11. Alex has been

serving as lead pastor since April 1, and Andy has been serving as community life pastor since July 1, following his year and a half tenure as transitional pastor at Oak Grove.

Regional Pastor Tony Doehrmann led the installation ceremony, and he anointed both Alex and Andy. He also shared with the congregation about the ministry of the Ohio Conference as part of Oak Grove's Missions Month.

Alex Dye noted that because of restrictions on group gatherings due to COVID-19, the official installation service was delayed. "But we have been enjoying our positions and are looking forward to seeing how God will continue to work through us in the mission of Oak Grove," he said. ■

Continued on page 9

ABOUT PEOPLE Continued from page 8

Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler was licensed and installed as lead pastor at Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Hartville on Oct. 18.

During the morning worship service, Nathanael's mother, Cindy, read the scripture, I Samuel 3:1-10 and I Corinthians 1:26-31. His father, Jeffery, brought the message. Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford led the installation ceremony.

Nathanael is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia. His wife, Savannah, grew up in Kidron.

Terry Shue, who had been serving the Maple Grove congregation as bridge pastor, will continue as associate pastor to assist during this transitional time, with a review in three months.



Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler was installed as lead pastor at Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Hartville on Oct. 18. Also pictured is his wife, Savannah.

Everence

James and Rachel Witmer of Alliance have been named recipients of the Everence Regional Journey Award for Northeast Ohio. This award recognizes the Witmers for their lifelong support for Christian education, medical service and church agencies.

"Jim and Rachel are worthy recipients of this award. They are generous and selfless," said Bruce Breckbill, Managing Director for Everence in Northeast Ohio. "Their support of their church and many other organizations is important and meaningful. It is a pleasure knowing them and seeing their passion for generosity and helping others."

For decades, the Witmers have committed significant time and resources to all levels of Christian education, including a church child-care center, a local school board, and Mennonite colleges. In addition, they have provided educational support



James and Rachel Witmer of Alliance, have received the Everence Regional Journey Award for their lifelong support for Christian education, medical service and church agencies. They are members of Beech Mennonite Church in Louisville.

to women from Nepal, helping them attend high school and medical school. This support stems from the Witmers' belief that education is key for people to reach their God-given potential.

In addition to their support for education, the Witmers are committed to local and international service. Though now retired, they've used a lifetime of service in the medical field to

serve people both locally and internationally. And starting with a volunteer assignment the late 1950s, James has provided decades of service to the country of Nepal. Rachel, a nurse, has also taught Sunday school and Bible school.

The Witmers attend Beech Mennonite Church in Louisville, Ohio, and are using their retirement years to garden, volunteer and enjoy their grandchildren. ■

Conference Calendar

DEC

3 Leadership Team Meeting, online via Zoom

JAN 2021

7 Ministry Development Team Meeting, online via Zoom

MAR

4-5 Missional Conference, online event

6 Annual Conference Assembly, online event

JUL

6-10 MennoCon21, Duke Energy Convention Center, Cincinnati, as well as online

Back page briefings...

SOOP (Service Opportunities with our Partners) is accepting applications! Use your gifts and skills to work alongside others in a network of ministries across the church. Flexibly designed for retirees, families, and adults over 25. Visit <https://www.mennonitemission.net/Serve/SOOP> to learn more.

Podcast fans: MennoMedia and Leader magazine have begun a new podcast series, the *~ing Podcast*. This podcast, hosted by Rev. Dr. Dennis Edwards and Allison Maus,

explores important questions for our time: How are people of faith bringing their best selves to the world each day? How are we living, growing, and being as people of God? To listen, go to <http://bit.ly/-ingPodcast>.

The Ohio Conference Immigration Resource Team would like to remind everyone that there are many opportunities to share God's love, hope, and peace. Are you looking for ideas about how you can share God's love with immigrants? The Immigration

Resource Team has compiled a list of immigration-related resources:

<http://bit.ly/OCImmigrationResourceList>.

!Explore helps youth test ministry gifts.

Through Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's !Explore program, students in grades 10–12 explore ministry and theology, grow in spiritual practices and listen for God's call through a summer congregational internship and a Group Experience (at AMBS in 2021 and Mennonite World Conference in 2022). Individuals can participate in both summers and receive a \$1,000 stipend each year. AMBS is taking applications for this program now. See ambbs.edu/explore for more information.

MennoCon21, the Mennonite Church USA Convention, is scheduled to take place July 6–10, 2021, in Cincinnati. Planners intend for this convention to be a hybrid event, meaning that there will be both in-person and virtual programming. Learn more in the first MennoCon21 newsletter: <http://bit.ly/MennoCon21Newsletter-Fall>. ■

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News & Views of Ohio Conference

For more Ohio Conference news, visit the Ohio Conference website: ohiomennoniteconference.org