

To: Ohio Conference Credentialed Ministers and Delegates  
From: Ohio Conference Leadership Team  
Subject: Future Direction of Conference  
Date: January 18, 2022

In 2002, Ohio Conference, then a conference of the denomination known as Mennonite Church (MC), joined the newly integrated Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). MC USA was a merger of two denominations – Mennonite Church (MC) and General Conference Mennonite Church (GC). All conferences joining the new denomination affirmed and signed a three-part agreement known as the *Membership Guidelines*.

Much has changed over the past 20 years in both Ohio Conference and MC USA. The Leadership Team of Ohio Conference has spent considerable time over the past several years looking at our identity and asking, “Who are we today, and where is God leading us into the future?” In response, we proposed and received verbal affirmation from both our credentialed ministers and our delegates for a new mission statement: *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 (Mark 12:29-31) and Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Gather, Equip & Send to Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples*

We will ask our delegates to affirm that change to our Constitution at our upcoming Annual Conference Assembly, March 4-5, 2022. This change to our Constitution will empower us to review the Constitution in its entirety since it, and our current structure, is based on the old mission statement which is now more than 15 years-old. That structure was developed at a time when our Conference had more congregations from which to draw volunteers. What would a new structure look like that is based on where God has led us these past several years to *Gather, Equip and Send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to love God, love others and make disciples of Jesus Christ?*

We see the next steps in clarifying our identity as reviewing our Constitution, our structure and our affiliations. The Leadership Team feels that this is also the appropriate time (April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023) to review our relationship with MC USA. This review would also be in accordance with a resolution that was passed by Ohio Conference’s delegate assembly in 2017.

There are four resolutions being presented at MC USA’s special delegate assembly scheduled for May 27-30, 2022, in Kansas City, Missouri: 1) Clarification on MC USA Polity and the Role of the Membership Guidelines of MC USA; 2) A study resolution entitled MC USA for Justice; 3) MC USA Accessibility Resolution; and 4) A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation, which will be considered in a two-part process. You can access those resolutions and more information on MC USA’s upcoming delegate assembly at MC USA’s website – [mennoniteusa.org](http://mennoniteusa.org).

While the Leadership Team of Ohio Conference expressed our concerns to MC USA’s Executive Board regarding the *Repentance & Transformation* resolution in a letter dated, October 8, 2021, and shared with our credentialed ministers and delegates in a statement on October 19, 2021, it has not been the practice of Ohio Conference to engage our delegates in discernment regarding

upcoming MC USA resolutions. We believe that is the role of each congregation, to prepare their MC USA delegate(s) in whatever way they feel best, to represent their congregation at the MC USA special delegate assembly. We encourage our congregations to send their delegate(s) to the special delegate assembly in Kansas City for your congregation's voice to be heard.

The type of discernment that will take place over the course of the next Ohio Conference church year, April 2022 – March 2023, will not be easy. In the not-too-distant past, many of us witnessed what unhealthy discernment looks like, with people aligning with others to push their desired outcome, some expressing their thoughts and feelings in inappropriate ways, and others feeling that they could not express their thoughts without a sense of condemnation. The result was the loss of many congregations and members as well as a poor Christian witness. Our prayer is that we can rise above these all-too-human temptations, treating all of our brothers and sisters with respect, and that we can remain united as a body of Christ as we discern God's leading us in the years ahead.

The Leadership Team is working on developing questions for delegates at our upcoming Annual Conference Assembly, to help us discern what the review of our Constitution, our structure, and our relationship with MC USA could look like in the year ahead.