

OHIO MENNONITE EVANGEL

News & Views of Ohio Conference

JAN-FEB 2022



ohiomennoniteconference.org

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'Befriending the Neighborhood: Am I a Good Neighbor?' is theme of 2022 gathering

Zion Mennonite to host Assembly

Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold will host the 2022 Annual Conference Assembly (ACA) of the Ohio Conference March 4-5. The theme of this year's gathering, based on Luke 10:25-37, will be "Befriending the Neighborhood: Am I a Good Neighbor?"

Ohio Conference also will hold a missional conference

at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold immediately prior to ACA, on March 3-4. See page 3 for more details about the missional conference.

Featured speakers during the worship services will be Howard and Cathy Wagler, church planters from Hutchinson, Kansas. They also will be the presenters at the missional conference preceding ACA. The Waglers currently are serving as net-



work directors for South Central Mennonite Conference.

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Borderlands Learning Tour: No easy answers

**By Dick Barrett
Conference Minister**

November 7th through the 14th of this past year I had the privilege and opportunity to participate in a Borderlands Learning Tour sponsored by the Great Lakes office of Mennonite Central Committee. The tour focused on the border between Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Mexico, approximately 120 miles

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Conference Minister Dick Barrett participated in a Borderlands Learning Tour sponsored by MCC Great Lakes Nov. 7-14. This mural is just one of many on the Mexican side of the wall in Agua Prieta, Mexico, across the border from Douglas, Arizona.

VOL. LXXVI, NO. 1

JAN/FEB 2022

Editor: Ann H. Leaman

Ohio Mennonite Evangel is published six times per year by the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA, Box 210, Kidron OH 44636, telephone (330) 857-5421.

All material for publication should be submitted to the editor at 5854 Sunland St. NE, Louisville OH 44641, or via telephone: 330-453-0150, or e-mail: ohioevangel@gmail.com, one month prior to desired publication date.

Ohio Mennonite Evangel is distributed to all households of Ohio Conference congregations, other interested individuals and church agencies.

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

Winter Read offers place for discussion

We would love to have you join us for the Ohio Conference Winter Read, which is currently underway.

This winter Ohio Conference is trying something new, a Conference-wide book study offered via Zoom. We are studying Latasha Morrison's book *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*. As of mid-January, 58 people are participating in the Winter Read.

Discussion leaders are Pastor Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells of Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland and



Pastors Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells and Kevin Himes

Pastor Kevin Himes of Salem Mennonite Church in Kidron. These pastors led their congregations in a joint study of the book last winter.

The discussion is taking place from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. on five Thursdays — Jan. 6, 13, and 20, and Feb.

3 and 17. The book is available as a paperback or on Kindle on the Amazon website: <https://bit.ly/BeTheBridgeBook>.

Even if you missed the first sessions, you can still join in the conversation. To register for these online discussions, go to <https://bit.ly/2022OCWinterRead>.

RESOURCE CORNER

'Little liturgies' can nurture faith

By Ann Leaman
Ohio Conference
Resource Advocate

If you are looking for ways to nurture faith at home, take a look at the free resources available online at The Soil and the Seed Project: [https://](https://www.thesoilandtheseedproject.org)

www.thesoilandtheseedproject.org.

This group has created "little liturgies" with downloadable music, art, prayers, scripture, and discussion prompts which can be used by individuals, families, or small communities. The



resources are intended for daily and weekly use in people's homes.

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Personnel of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

Moderator: Vacancy
Assistant Moderator: Paula Snyder Belousek — pastor@salem-mennonite.com
Credentialing Ministry Chair: Vickie Yoder — rev.vickieyoder@gmail.com
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Conference Editor: Ann Leaman — ohioevangel@gmail.com
Coordinator of Volunteers: Alysia Short — alysashort@gmail.com

Annual Conference Assembly

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Registration for ACA will begin Friday, March 4, at 12:30 p.m. The first business session for delegates will begin at 1:30 p.m. ACA will conclude at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday after the final business session.

In addition to business sessions and worship services, ACA will include special times for prayer, workshops, and displays from church-related agencies.

Out of an abundance of caution, and to ensure the safety of everyone attending this year, Ohio Conference will require masks for all participants at ACA.

The registration fee for ACA is \$45 per person if received by **Feb. 11, and \$60 per person after that date. There is an additional charge for meals.**

Registration forms and more information about ACA are available on the Ohio Confer-



ence website: <https://bit.ly/2022ACAInfo>. To register online, go to <https://bit.ly/2022ACARegistration>. ■

Equipping people for mission in their own neighborhoods

Conference to focus on how to be a good neighbor

Ohio Conference will hold a missional conference March 3-4 at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, immediately prior to the 2022 Annual Conference Assembly. The theme of the missional conference, based on Luke 10:25-37, will be “Befriending the Neighborhood: Am I a Good Neighbor?”

Presenters will be Howard and Cathy Wagler, church planters from Hutchinson, Kansas. The Wagers currently are serving

South Central Mennonite Conference as network directors.

Cost for the missional conference is \$45 per person, with a discounted rate of \$25 per person for individuals who are also attending Annual Conference Assembly. Young adults under age 30 qualify for a special discounted registration fee of \$20 per person.

Registration is due by **Feb. 11**. To register online, go to <https://bit.ly/2022MissionalConference>.



bit.ly/2022MissionalConference. For more details, see the conference brochure at <https://bit.ly/2022MissionalConferenceBrochure>. ■

Church planters Cathy and Howard Wagler of Kansas will be the presenters at the 2022 missional conference. They are network directors for South Central Mennonite Conference.

Resource corner

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Seth Crissman, the project director for The Soil and the Seed Project, said on the project’s Facebook page, “This project is intended for individuals, families or small communities that are seeking to allow the Good News to take root in their lives so that they can be

transformed and actively live out the deep love that God has for the whole world in their daily lives. The name comes from Jesus’ Parable in Matthew 13 about the soil and the Seed.”

Seth Crissman, the project director for this endeavor, is a musician and songwriter known

through his work with the Walking Roots Band. He and his wife, Theresa, were scheduled to be the featured presenters at Ohio Conference’s missional festival, Engaging Mission 2020. Unfortunately, that event had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■

Borderlands tour

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Razor wire is reflective of the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border wall in Douglas, Arizona.



southeast of Tucson. Both Ohio Conference's Leadership Team and I felt this was an important step in continuing to live out Conference's immigration resolution and initiative. Ten church leaders from the Great Lakes area were led by three Mennonite Central Committee staff, all with a wide range of experience on the issues of immigration.

For me, one of the few with no first-hand experience, it was eye-opening, adding many perspectives that many of us in the United States never get to experience. At one extreme I was able to witness the lack of hope of a better future for many of those living in Mexico and other South and Central American countries, as well as other countries around the world, to the militarization of the border, and the dehumanization of people — men, women and children — at so many levels. At the other extreme I was able to witness the courageous efforts

of so many people on both sides of the border who have dedicated their lives to helping migrants. These included people serving at shelters (short and long term) on both sides, providing education and legal assistance, as well as providing water and first aid to those who try to cross the border in the most difficult of conditions at the risk of their own lives. The question that kept coming to me throughout the entire tour was, "What would cause a person to risk so much to try and get into a country that they don't know that much about?"

That question was highlighted during the week when I was able to engage in conversation with two young women who had migrated to the U.S.-Mexican border from Honduras. One was a 21-year-old with a 2-year-old son, and the other was a 25-year-old with a 4-year-old son. They had begun their long journey from Honduras alone but met each other somewhere along the way. I learned throughout the tour that most likely someone

in their extended family paid a cartel somewhere between \$15,000 - \$25,000 to assist each one of them and their child getting from Honduras to the border and across. The

cost usually includes three attempts. Both of these women had already been turned back twice and were looking forward to their third attempt. My question for them was, "Why?" And their answer was the same: "There is no future for me and my family from where we come from." That, and "fear for their lives," seemed to be the most common answer from the migrants we encountered in a variety of different situations and locations.

The Borderlands Learning Tour left me with some of the same thoughts I had after experiencing a trip many years ago to Guatemala, and one several years ago to Israel/Palestine. There are no easy answers to these big problems and issues. But that does not mean that we should not be trying to address them. Often we seem to retreat to our own cocoons where we are surrounded by like-minded people with whom we hold similar beliefs and easy answers. At other times we seem to go towards one

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Borderlands tour

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Conference Minister Dick Barrett (back row, far left) was part of the group participating in the MCC Great Lakes Borderlands Tour Nov. 7-14.

extreme or the other, de-humanizing people on all sides.

Two thoughts kept on coming back to me during the tour. One, what if we were to focus more on this being a humanitarian issue than a law and order issue? There was no doubt after experiencing what I did over the 10-day period on what type of issue the United States has

made it. My fear is where the majority of my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, otherwise known as the church, are putting the emphasis. The other is, if we as Christians in America take Jesus' Greatest Commandments of "loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves" seriously, how well are we loving the

people in Mexico who are some of our closest neighbors? A first step for many of us is educating ourselves to the truth of the issues of migration and taking advantage of opportunities to experience them first-hand, such as a Borderlands Tour sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee. ■

Women in Leadership Retreat to feature Rebecca Slough

There's still time to register for Ohio Conference's Women in Leadership Retreat, which will be held Feb. 18-19 at the St. Francis Spirituality Center in Tiffin.

Retreat planners are encouraging every Ohio Conference congregation to send at least one woman to this retreat. Has your congregation tapped someone to attend this retreat?

The theme of the Women in Leadership Retreat is

"Empowered by the Holy Spirit to lead like yourself." Rebecca Slough, academic dean emerita and professor emerita of worship and the arts at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, will be the retreat speaker. She is passionate about supporting women to become confident, trustworthy, but not perfect, leaders.

Cost of the retreat is \$75 per person. Registration is due by **Jan. 28**. For more information, please see the retreat brochure: <https://>



Rebecca Slough

bit.ly/2022WomeninLeadershipBrochure. To register, go to <https://bit.ly/WomenInLeadershipRetreat>. ■

CONFERENCE MINISTER MUSINGS

Loving my neighbor and forbearance

By Dick Barrett
Conference Minister

There is an old saying that goes something like, “We get to pick our friends, but we don’t get to pick our family.” Well, I would add, “We don’t get to pick our neighbors.” In the Great Commandment(s) Jesus tells us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength. The second is like this: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31a).

What Jesus doesn’t tell us is who our neighbors actually are. Are they the people that live around us? Are they the people that we agree with and have affinity towards? Are they our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do they include the people I disagree with? Might they even include my enemies? I think Jesus meant everyone. Our neighbors are the people that we encounter at any specific time. It might be our family members, it might be the people we live around (especially the ones I struggle with the most), it might be our brothers and sisters in Christ (including the ones that I am the furthest from theologically), and it might be my enemy (the one who has hurt me the most). All those people are my neighbors, and Jesus calls us to love them all in the same way he loves us.

I believe that one of the things the past two years of the

COVID pandemic has taught us as a nation is that we are not very good at loving our neighbors as ourselves. Many have put themselves above their neighbors. Many have disrespected and treated with contempt those they have disagreed with. Even more disappointing than what appears to be a lack of love for our neighbors as a nation, is the lack of love for our neighbors as the church. We base our decisions on what’s best for me, we have criticized others in person and on social media, we have cut ourselves off from those we have disagreed with, and some who identify themselves as Christians have even gone so far as to commend, advocate and/or participate in violence against those whom they disagree with. If there is truth to that song, “They’ll Know We are Christians by Our Love,” then it really shouldn’t surprise us that many people today, both inside and outside the church, are questioning what the purpose of church really is. Do we have something different to offer than those outside the church have to offer?

In 2015 Mennonite Church USA’s Delegate Assembly passed a resolution entitled *Forbearance in the Midst of Differences*. While that resolution was calling for forbearance specifically in relation to conferences, congregations, and members in the church who have come to different conclusions regarding whether it is permissible to bless same-sex covenant unions, forbearance can



and should be extended to all the issues that might divide Christians. I must confess that in 2015 I struggled with that resolution and with the whole idea of forbearance. Most of my struggle was because I had little knowledge of what biblical forbearance was all about. In fact, at that time I was even questioning if forbearance is actually biblical.

Over the past six years I have been trying to become more knowledgeable about biblical forbearance. The English word “forbearance” is found only a couple of times in the Bible and in different passages, depending on which version of the Bible one uses. In the New International Version it is found only once: “God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Romans 3:25b). In the King James version it is used to translate Paul’s instruction about how we are to love fellow Christians: “forbear one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2), and “forbearing one another, and

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“I believe that one of the things the past two years of the COVID pandemic has taught us as a nation is that we are not very good at loving our neighbors as ourselves. Many have put themselves above their neighbors.”

Musings

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forgiving one another” (Colossians 3:13). In many places and in many translations the idea of forbearance is translated as patience. Forbearance might best be captured in Peter’s second letter when he writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness, instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 NIV). While in many passages the two words can be used interchangeably, and patience is always included in forbearance, forbearance requires more.

James Calvin Davis, in his book *Forbearance – A Theological Ethic for a Disagreeable Church*, one of the few books I have been able to find looking at forbearance as a theological concept, writes, “To forbear literally means to hold back. The several words translated as ‘forbearance’ in the English versions of the Bible usually capture the sense of someone abstaining from acting on a judgement” (p.10). He elaborates further, “The concept of forbearance, then, captures the foundational act of divine grace on which all of

Christian belief is built! God acted to extend forbearance to us, to pass over – that is to refuse to respond negatively to – our sins, instead extending righteousness and patience to us as an act of grace and love embodied in Jesus Christ” (p. 13).

Forbearance does not mean that we agree with fellow Christians on any given topic. In fact, it means just the opposite. It is the recognition that we do disagree and we choose to remain in a loving relationship with that person, or those persons, with whom we disagree (however that relationship may look), acknowledging that it is not our position to judge. Forbearance is what God has chosen to do with all of us, withholding the punishment for our sins and extending the offer of the gift of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ as an act of grace and love. A quote that I was recently reminded of says, “It is God’s responsibility to judge, it is the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to convict people of their sin and cause them to repent, and it is our responsibility to love them in the same way that Jesus Christ has loved

us.”

Whoever our neighbors might be, our brothers and sisters in Christ fall in that group, and we are commanded to forbear in love towards them. Trying to force one side or another on any given topic to agree with the other, and/or demanding one side or the other to repent, is not biblical forbearance nor Christian love.

In the year or years ahead, we will be facing some difficult decisions as a conference of Mennonite churches throughout Ohio and the surrounding states. While this has always been the case, it is even more challenging in what has become a very polarized time. Just as important as the decisions we make will be how we engage in the process of discernment and making those decisions. Will we choose to respond in the same ways that the outside world has responded to all the conflict over the past couple of years? Will we respond in the same way we have responded in the not too distant past? Or, will we respond in a way that honors God, forbearing and loving one another? ■

“Forbearance does not mean that we agree with fellow Christians on any given topic. In fact, it means just the opposite. It is the recognition that we do disagree and we choose to remain in a loving relationship with that person, or those persons, with whom we disagree....”

Everence scholarship application deadline is Feb. 28

GOSHEN, Indiana — Everence Financial® is accepting applications for college scholarships for the 2022-2023 school year until Feb. 28.

Everence will award 45 regional scholarships of \$1,000 to students chosen by local Everence offices. Three students also will receive national scholarships —

one of \$2,000 and two of \$1,000 — so the top three recipients will have Everence scholarships totaling \$3,000 or \$2,000.

Everence scholarships are a member benefit. Students, their parents or legal guardian must own or be using an Everence product. Purchasing an Ever-

ence product or opening an Everence Federal Credit Union account provides immediate eligibility.

For questions, contact kelly.troyer@everence.com. More information also is available on the Everence website at everence.com/scholarships. ■

ABOUT PEOPLE

Pastoral notes

Linda Riegsecker was installed as associate pastor of West Clinton Mennonite Church on Nov. 21.



On Nov. 21 Conference Minister Dick Barrett installed Linda Riegsecker as associate pastor at West Clinton Mennonite Church in Wauseon during the morning worship service.

Linda, who grew up at West Clinton, recently returned to the area after serving for 22 years as a school nurse at Santiago Christian School in the Dominican Republic. She is serving on the West Clinton pastoral team with Lead Pastor Ryan Harker and Children's Pastor Brenna Harker. ■

Homer Yutzy

Homer Yutzy, who served as pastor of Inlet Mennonite Church in Wauseon from 1987 through his retirement in 1991, died Dec. 12.

Homer was born July 19, 1926, in Plain City, Ohio, to Emery and Florence (Kramer) Yutzy. He was the second of 11 children and grew up on a farm within the Amish community there. As a young man, he attended Michigan Mennonite Bible School in Fairview, Michigan, which led to his going to Naubinway, Michigan, to serve the church through the Mennonite Church Voluntary Service program. Here he met his wife to be, Elizabeth Williams. They were united in marriage in Naubinway on Nov. 29, 1952.

Homer was a graduate of North Central Michigan College

and Goshen Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

He was ordained as a minister in the Mennonite Church in Naubinway, Michigan, on Oct. 18, 1953, and was sent to Gay, Michigan, to continue a church planting mission. He also was a pastor of churches in Petosky, Michigan, and Tavistock, Ontario, before coming to Inlet Mennonite Church in 1987.

Homer is survived by his wife Elizabeth (Williams); three children, Joy (Ike), Rhoda (Pat) and Keith (Linda), daughter-in-law Kathy Yutzy Nabitz; eight grandchildren, Seth Porter (Kelsey), Sean Porter (Kate), Rachel Caluza, Caitlin Ryan, Joe Ryan (Cassandra), Nicholas Yutzy (Metinat) and Nathan Yutzy; four siblings, Ada Schlabach, Paul (Martha) Yutzy,



Allen (Connie) Yutzy and Esther Zeitz; a brother-in-law, Bud Legault; and sister-in-law Sherry Wicker. He is also survived by five great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by a son, Paul Yutzy; an infant daughter,

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ABOUT PEOPLE Continued from page 8

ter, Faith Ann; four brothers (Ralph, Dan, Norman, Val); two sisters (Katherine, Lula); seven sisters-in-law; two brothers-in-law; two nieces; and two nephews.

Homer donated his body to the Toledo Medical College for

scientific research. A memorial service was held on Saturday, Jan. 8, at Tedrow Mennonite Church in Wauseon.

Memorial Donations may be made to Habitat for Humanity, PO Box 333, 104 Monroe St., Delta OH 43515, Sunshine

Community, 7223 Maumee Western Road, Maumee OH 43537, or Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave., Elkhart IN 46517.

For a complete obituary, please see <https://bit.ly/HomerYutzyObituary>. ■

Ohio Conference staff

Regional Pastor Ralph Reinford has announced that he plans to retire at the end of March 2022. He has served as regional pastor for the eastern part of the Ohio Conference since 2011.

Prior to his work with the Ohio Conference, Ralph was pastor of Wooster Mennonite Church for 14 years. He also had pastoral experience in the Virginia Conference in both church planting settings and in established congregations. He and his wife, Barbara, live in the Dalton area.

Because of Ralph's planned retirement, Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA is seeking a half-time regional pastor for the Eastern region of the state beginning April 2022. This individual will primarily serve as pastor to the pastors and as a liaison between the Conference and congregations. Previous pastoral experience required. Women and men from all cultural backgrounds are encouraged to apply. For a full job description, please see <https://bit.ly/RegionalPastorEast>. To apply, submit a letter of interest



to Conference Minister
Dick Barrett
at ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com. ■

The Voice

Our congratulations go to Girl Named Tom, the sibling trio of Caleb, Joshua and Bekah Liechty, who were named the winners of the 21st season of NBC's *The Voice* during the season finale Dec. 14. Their home congregation is Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold.

Girl Named Tom was the first group to win *The Voice*. For an



interview of the group with American Songwriter, see

<https://bit.ly/GNTAmericanSongwriter>. ■

Girl Named Tom, including (left to right) Joshua, Bekah and Caleb Liechty, shared their musical talents with the Ohio Conference as part of the online worship service during the 2021 Annual Conference Assembly. They were named the winners of the 21st season of NBC's *The Voice*.

Conference Calendar

JAN

- 18 Cluster Meeting for Delegates, Bethel Mennonite, West Liberty
- 20 *Be the Bridge* online book study, via Zoom
- 27 Cluster Meeting for Delegates, Salem Mennonite, Kidron

FEB

- 1 Cluster Meeting for Delegates, Tedrow Mennonite, Wauseon
- 3 *Be the Bridge* online book study, via Zoom
- 10 Cluster Meeting for Delegates, Maple Grove Mennonite, Hartville
- 15 Online Cluster Meeting for Delegates via Zoom
- 17 *Be the Bridge* online book study, via Zoom
- 18-19 Women in Leadership Retreat, St. Francis Spirituality Center, Tiffin

MAR

- 3-4 Missional Conference, Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold
- 4-5 Annual Conference Assembly, Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold

APR

- 22-23 Ohio MCC Comforter Bash, Kidron Community Park Recreation Building, Kidron

MAY

- 27-30 Mennonite Church USA Special Delegate Assembly, Kansas City, Missouri

cal Seminary and Mennonite Church USA Faith Formation. Join us Feb. 21–24, either virtually or in person on the AMBS campus in Elkhart, Indiana, to explore the theme, “Formed in the Wilderness, Leading in Hope.” Speakers will be Sibonokuhle Ncube, Eleanor Kreider, Tom Yoder Neufeld and Rolando Sosa Granados. Workshop descriptions are online:

ambs.edu/pastorsandleaders.

Save the date for the Ohio MCC Comforter Bash on April 22-23! A handmade comforter provides not only warmth, but also a tangible message to people that their needs are not forgotten. Join others of all ages for this two-day event in Kidron to knot comforters that Mennonite Central Committee will distribute around the world. We invite you to make comforter tops and backs (60"x80") for use at the Comforter Bash. Comforter backs and tops should be dropped off at the MCC Material Resources Center in Kidron (4080 Kidron Road) between Jan. 1 and March 1. For more information, visit mcc.org/ohio-comforter-bash. ■

Back page briefings...

Mennonite World Conference has opened registration for online participants for its 17th global assembly July 5-10 in Semarang, Indonesia, at indonesia2022.mwc-cmm.org. For more information about the assembly,

see <https://bit.ly/MWC2022AssemblyOnline>.

Calling all pastors and faith formation leaders! Register for **Pastors & Leaders | Deep Faith 2022**, a joint conference of Anabaptist Mennonite Bibli-

OHIO MENNONITE
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News & Views of Ohio Conference

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