

**Minutes of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference Assembly**  
**Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA**  
**Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio**  
**March 4-5, 2022**

**1:30-3 p.m. – Business Session 1**

A1. **Welcome** – Paula Snyder Belousek, acting moderator, welcomed delegates to Annual Conference Assembly.

A2. **Opening Song** – Bill Seymour led delegates in singing “When Long Before Time.”

A3. **Minutes of 2021 ACA** – Paula asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the 2021 Annual Conference Assembly. Chip Welch moved to approve the minutes, and Ken Sims seconded.

**The minutes of the 2021 Annual Conference Assembly were approved unanimously.**

A4. **Introduction of Table Groups/Conversation Covenant** – Paula invited delegates to take time to introduce themselves to the others in their table groups, and instructed them to read and sign the conversation covenant. This document outlined the commitments of how delegates would relate to one another during their discussions.

A5. **Introduction and Blessing of New Pastors and New Regional Pastor** – Conference Minister Dick Barrett and Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Tony Doehrmann introduced the pastors with new assignments in the Ohio Conference: Meredith Caldwell, pastor at Salem Mennonite (Waldron, Mich.); David Tijerina, interim pastor at Good Shepherd Mennonite (Archbold); Dan Hooley, co-pastor at Crown Hill Mennonite (Rittman); Hank Unruh, family life pastor at Salem Mennonite (Kidron); Keith and Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, pastors at Millersburg Mennonite (transitioning from interim to long-term); Brenna Harker, children’s minister at West Clinton Mennonite (Wauseon); Linda Riegsecker, associate pastor at West Clinton Mennonite (Wauseon); and Sherah-Leigh Gerber, regional pastor – east.

Dick Barrett led a time of prayer for these pastors with new assignments.

A6. **Remembering Pastors Who Have Passed** – Dick Barrett mentioned two Ohio Conference pastors who died in the past year: Homer Yutzey, who was pastor of Inlet Mennonite Church from 1987 to 1991; and Ernest Martin, who was pastor of Midway Mennonite Church from 1951 to 1989. Dick led the delegates in a time of prayer, giving thanks for the calling on these pastors’ lives.

A7. **Congregational Transitions** – Both Lafayette Christian Fellowship in Fresno and Southside Mennonite Church in Springfield have ceased meeting. Dick gave a special recognition of Leon and Glenda Mast, who served as long-time elders at Southside Mennonite and were involved in the church plant there 40 years ago.

A8. **Introduction of Trenton Mennonite Church** – Dick Barrett introduced Trenton Mennonite Church, which has applied for membership in the Ohio Conference. The congregation is located in the city of Trenton, which is located in Butler County. The congregation has a long history, going back to a settlement of Amish Mennonites in the area in the early 1800s. The Trenton Mennonite congregation

was formed in 1897. For much of its history, Trenton Mennonite has been a member of Central District Conference (CDC), but it has not been strongly aligned with the CDC for the past several years. Dick Barrett has been meeting with congregational leaders and the congregation, and he has been in dialogue with the CDC. In October Trenton Mennonite requested membership in the Ohio Conference, and the CDC leadership sent a letter supporting this decision. The Ohio Conference Leadership Team recommends that delegates affirm accepting Trenton Mennonite as a member congregation of the Ohio Conference.

Dick led delegates in a time of prayer.

**A9. Introduction of Resolutions Committee and Parliamentarian** – Paula introduced the members of the Resolutions Committee: Lucas Johnson, Rebecca Kauffman, and Mary Spearman. She also introduced the parliamentarian for these meetings, Eric Richer.

**A10. Introduction and Action on Gifts Discernment Slate** – Alvis Pettker, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, noted that Gifts Discernment Ministry has had a challenging time finding people to fill Conference roles. He introduced the slate of nominees, and he asked delegates to fill out the nominations sheet with suggestions of individuals who could fill these roles in coming years. The Gifts Discernment Ministry will use these suggestions as they work to fill the slate for the next Conference year. After Alvis' presentation, delegates completed their Gifts Discernment ballots.

**A11. Group Discernment and Table Talk** – Dick noted that much has changed in the past two years since our last in-person Annual Conference Assembly. We are a more cohesive group than we were five to seven years ago, even though there is still diversity among us. From 2015-17, we spent time on the Gathered and Sent Initiative, which focused on how God gathers us together and also sends us out into the world.

The Leadership Team has shared a proposed new mission statement for the Conference with credentialed pastors and delegates and has heard affirmation for this new statement.

The proposed statement is as follows:

We believe that Jesus Christ is at the center of who we are and all we do as Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

The mission of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA is to Gather, Equip and Send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out God's Greatest Commandments<sup>1</sup> and Jesus' Great Commission.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mark 12:29-31

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 28:18-20

Adopting a new mission statement will require a constitutional change, since the current mission statement is included in the Ohio Conference Constitution. That constitutional change will empower us to begin a review process of the entire constitution and Conference structure. In addition, the Leadership Team feels that it is time to review our relationship with Mennonite Church USA. This review seems to fit with the rest of the review process. In addition, the review is in accord with the resolution

passed by the delegate body in 2017 which calls for a review of Ohio Conference's affiliation with the denomination if Mennonite Church USA makes a substantive change to its membership guidelines.

Dick noted that the word "review" causes our anxieties to rise, but that should not be so. Any healthy organization needs to go through this process periodically. Where is God leading us in the future? We don't want to just be reactionary to all that is going on around us.

Dick explained that delegates would be asked to discuss using a flexible circle process. The intent of this process is to give an opportunity for all to speak, and not to have a discussion that is dominated by one person.

Table groups were asked to discuss three main questions:

- Can you affirm the proposed change of the Ohio Conference mission statement?
- Do you have any affirmations, concerns, or questions?
- Should the introductory statement stay in the mission statement?

#### **A12. Open Mic Time –**

Andrew Blount, Bethel Mennonite (Table 2) – Is the bold section at the bottom of the page included in the mission statement? (That section reads as follows: "Gather, Equip and Send to Love God, Love others and make disciples of Jesus Christ.")

Dick Barrett – That part won't be included.

Hank Unruh, Salem Mennonite (Kidron) (Table 16) – His group affirmed having a statement that deals with mission. Should the introductory section have a more trinitarian statement?

Keith Lyndaker Schlabach, Millersburg Mennonite (Table 5) – His group affirms the mission statement, but they question not explicitly naming the marginalized. Could wording be added affirming the dignity of all?

Sean Swanson, First Mennonite (Table 14) – They affirmed the statement and appreciated the action language used. They noted that the Ministry Development Team has Faith, Worship and Witness focus leaders, reflecting the current mission statement, so we would need to change these roles to reflect the new "Gather, Equip and Send" language. They affirm the opening statement.

Lucas Johnson, Valley View Mennonite (Table 8) – His group affirms the change of the mission statement and affirms the opening statement. One question raised: What does this statement mean for us practically?

Cheryl Vanatsky, Maple Grove Mennonite (Table 15) – Her group noticed that there were clear action statements. It was noted that in moving toward the next steps of a review of the constitution and the relationship with Mennonite Church USA, things might morph even more. They felt it was nice that Holy Spirit was noted.

Nancy Yoder, West Clinton Mennonite (Table 12) – Her group noted that the statement adds clarity, and was more specific. As far as the opening statement goes, they would suggest that we shorten it and put it at the end of the other statement.

Mel Hathaway, Sonenberg Mennonite (Table 13) – His group affirms the new mission statement and the opening statement, although they would agree with the idea of shortening the opening statement. They liked that it was a stronger action statement, and they appreciated that the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Will the scripture references be included in the mission statement?

Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler, Maple Grove Mennonite (Hartville) (Table 17) – There was general affirmation of the new mission statement. It's actionable and clearer. They would suggest that we cut the repetition of the words "Mennonite Church USA."

Joel Shenk, Toledo Mennonite (Table 11) – His group had affirmation for the statement. It distinguishes that Conference has a role. They liked the scripture references, and they were ambivalent about the preamble statement.

**A13. Introduction of Visitors** – Paula Snyder Belousek introduced visitors attending with displays from different organizations.

**A14. Missional Story** – Dick Barrett introduced Sister Ellen Lamberjack from Project Hope, which is based at Zion Mennonite Church. Project Hope is sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin, as well as Zion Mennonite Church. This nonprofit organization began in October 2006. Sister Ellen introduced the staff members of Project Hope and described some of the history of the organization, which works with immigrants. Project Hope provides professional legal services and educates immigrants about the rights and responsibilities of living in the United States. In 15 years, Project Hope has worked on 3,800 applications or consultations, working with people from 59 different countries. Of those assisted, 210 have become citizens.

**A15. Gifts Discernment Vote Results** – Results of the Gifts Discernment ballot were announced. Of 119 votes cast for the Gifts Discernment ballot, 117 affirmed the entire ballot, and two affirmed individuals on the ballot. **Therefore, all individuals on the ballot were affirmed for service.**

**A16. Welcome and Instructions** – Corben Weaver Boshart, one of the pastors at Zion Mennonite Church, welcomed all the delegates to Zion and gave some words of orientation to the building.

**3-3:30 p.m. – Break/Displays/Snacks**

**3:30-4:45 p.m. – Business Session 2**

**A17. Opening Song** – Bill Seymour led the delegates in singing "If the War Goes On" and "Let There Be Light, Lord God."

**A18. Prayer** – Dick Barrett led delegates in prayer, mentioning the war in Ukraine.

**A19. Leadership Development Resource Team** – Dick Barrett reported on the work of the Leadership Development Resource Team. In addition to Dick Barrett, team members included Tony Doehrmann, Shawn Hilliard, Rebecca Kauffman, Danae King, Joel Shenk and Miriam Zehr. This resource team was created to respond to the increasing difficulty of finding candidates for pastoral positions in Ohio

Conference congregations. The team has developed a list of degree and non-degree programs available for people experiencing a call to ministry. This list can be found on the Ohio Conference website.

The team explored barriers to candidates for ministry, especially women in ministry. The team sent a survey to pastors and congregational leaders to learn more about attitudes about women in ministry. The survey results showed strong support for women to serve in leadership. Some respondents made a distinction between lead pastors and other pastors. Ohio Conference has grown in this area, but there is more room for growth. A report with the results of this survey is posted on the Ohio Conference website. Twenty-five women participated in the recent Women in Leadership Retreat. The primary responsibility to identify those with leadership gifts lies with all of us.

**A20. Anti-Racism Update** – Paula Snyder Belousek gave an update on the Conference’s anti-racism efforts. In June 2020 the Leadership Team released a statement after the death of George Floyd. That statement encouraged congregations to commit to learning, listening and acting in response to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Leadership Team wanted to not only make an official statement about racism, but also to hold ourselves accountable. The Leadership Team, Ministry Development Team and staff members have gone through anti-racism training provided by Widerstand Consulting and have begun to have conversation, looking at structures and systems in the Conference. This is an ongoing conversation.

A new effort in this area was the Ohio Conference Winter Read. A group of people from around the Conference participated in a study of Latasha Morrison’s book, *Be the Bridge*, and participated in discussions over Zoom. This book study was led by two pastors, Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells and Kevin Himes. Breakout conversation times were a highlight of this experience. The Leadership Team is working toward a partnership with a consultant for more work in this area, especially long-term training for staff and volunteers on our ministry teams.

**A21. Mennonite Mission Network** – Eric Frey Martin, constituent engagement representative from Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), spoke about MMN’s programs. MMN’s vision is for every congregation to be involved. We live in a fractured world, but we still have hope. We are called to bring peace and hope to the world. Ohio Conference congregations have supported MMN workers.

Many Ohio Conference congregations have participated in the Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI). MMN is now revamping that program. MMN also offers short-term service programs and other service programs. He noted that during the last fiscal year ending July 31, 2021, Ohio Conference congregations gave \$318,869 to MMN.

**A22. Introduction of Spending Plan** – Andrew Blount, chair of the Stewardship Ministry, presented a financial report and the proposed spending plan for 2022-23. He noted several budget changes, including increasing spending for events and staff. The Stewardship Ministry is asking for congregations to bless Conference with stable giving. He also gave a brief report on the Pastoral Leadership Investment Fund and other reserve funds which the Conference has.

**A23. Table Discussion on Spending Plan** – Delegates spent some time discussing the financial report and the proposed spending plan in their table groups.

#### A24. **Open Mic** –

Andrew Blount, Bethel Mennonite (Table 2) – He gave an answer to a question his table group had asked. If a line item is in the spending plan but the amount spent is \$0, it means that the program is still continuing, but money has not been needed for it during this fiscal year.

Darin Nissley, First Mennonite (Table 5) – He asked about the line item which calls for a transfer of funds from capital funds. Is this an anticipated shortfall, or is this line item put in just in case capital funds are needed?

Andrew Blount – Usually this line item has not been needed. If these funds were needed, they would come from the operating reserve fund.

Dottie Hathaway, Sonneberg Mennonite (Table 1) – Her table group asked about lines 20 and 21 in the spending plan, which deal with spending for Open Arms Hispanic Ministries and Brazo en Brazo. It appears that funding for these ministries was not included in last year's spending plan, although Open Arms and Brazo en Brazo actually did receive funds. Her table group was not questioning the decision to give funds to these ministries, just wondering why those line items were not in last year's spending plan.

Andrew Blount – That omission is an error in this report. Those ministries were actually in last year's spending plan as well.

Alvis Pettker, Friendship Mennonite (Table 12) – His table group wanted clarification on lines 42 and 43, both of which have to do with congregational giving.

Andrew Blount – Receipts from congregations who are not members of Mennonite Church USA are recorded in a different line item, recording them separately from receipts from congregations which are members of Mennonite Church USA. The Conference's tithe to the denomination is based only on receipts from congregations which are a part of Mennonite Church USA.

A 25. **Table Time** – Delegates spent time in discussion in their table groups about a proposal to review Ohio Conference's constitution, structure, and affiliation. Delegates were asked to discuss the following questions:

- How do you feel about moving forward with the review process, looking at the constitution, structure, and affiliation with Mennonite Church USA?
- What is one question or concern you want the Leadership Team to be aware of moving forward?

#### A26. **Open Mic** –

Joel Shenk, Toledo Mennonite (Table 11) – His group had a lot of acknowledgment that much has changed in the past 20 years, and so it makes sense to review. They are not cheering about the need to review, but agree that it should be done. They do not want to be reactive to what is going on, but there are some things troubling them that they would like to look at. A review process is a chance for us to think about who we are as a Conference. We don't want to act in an antagonistic way.

Keith Lyndaker Schlabach, Millersburg Mennonite (Table 5) – His group agreed that whatever the discussions are, they should be pointing toward Jesus. As we discuss, we should consider whether the discussion is pointing to Jesus, pointing away, or neutral.

Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler, Maple Grove Mennonite (Hartville) (Table 17) – His group wondered when to expect a timeline for the review process.

Paula Snyder Belousek – Leadership Team will communicate that information as clearly as they can. Planning of the review procedure is in process, and Leadership Team (including several new members) will meet again after ACA.

Mel Hathaway, Sonnenberg Mennonite (Table 13) – His table group had general affirmation for a review process. They felt the need for a way to present information about the review process to our congregations so that they can be involved in the discernment process. There is a need for Ohio Conference leadership to give direction to congregations after the denominational convention in May.

Bill Seymour, Orrville (Table 7) – His group agreed with Table 13's request to give us a way to talk about this process with our congregations. We also need to encourage our congregations to be involved in the process so that this review is not just a top-down process.

Matt Weaver, Lockport Mennonite (Table 9) – His table group had a similar conversation to those shared previously. There was a clear sense that it is good to review our constitution and structure. They agreed that we should review our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA, but it is hard to have those difficult conversations, and some members of his group are not sure that our congregations are ready for that discussion.

Hank Unruh, Salem Mennonite (Kidron) (Table 16) – His group had many questions about what a review process looks like. What happens to congregations that have dual-conference affiliations? It's important to remember that these are two separate conversations (structure and affiliation).

Nancy Yoder, West Clinton Mennonite (Table 12) – Her group has mixed feelings about moving forward with the review process. Some feel positive, while some are fearing that this process will be divisive. Some are fine with ambiguity, and some are not. What does the process look like? Have some minds already been made up?

Ernie Hershberger, Berlin Mennonite (Table 15) – They affirm the review of relationships. They see the need for clear communication, and think that there should be common definitions of concepts. All voices should be heard.

Paula Snyder Belousek – She encouraged us to move together in the spirit of Jesus. She noted that pastors in the Conference have a strong commitment to relationship together. What does it mean to move constructively and well? She asked for prayer for the Leadership Team.

**A27. Missional Story** – Monday Meals – Bill Seymour, pastor of Orrville Mennonite Church, shared about Orrville's Monday Meals program. The pandemic brought many changes, and the congregation was praying and focusing on how they could be a blessing to the community. March 23, 2020, was the first time they served a meal, using a drive-through takeout system. They connected with others also helping with food issues. They stopped serving meals at the end of July 2020, but by September they decided to resume for at least a year (and they are still continuing). They involved their six-church group in Wayne County. So far, they have served 9,406 meals.

**A28. Announcements** – Paula Snyder Belousek noted that including Trenton Mennonite Church, there are 42 congregations in the Ohio Conference. She shared several announcements and encouraged

delegates to sign notes of blessing for Ralph Reinford, retiring regional pastor; and Sherah-Leigh Gerber, new regional pastor.

**5-6 p.m. – Workshops**

**6-7:15 p.m. – Dinner**

**7:30-9 p.m. – Worship**

**Saturday, March 9**

**8:10-8:25 a.m. – Prayer Time**

**8:30-10 a.m. – Business Session 3**

A29. **Opening Song** – Bill Seymour led delegates in singing “Healing Balm, Forgiving Lord” and “O God in Heaven.”

A30. **Opening Prayer** – Linda Riegsecker, associate pastor of West Clinton Mennonite Church, led delegates in an opening prayer.

A31. **Immigration Resource Team Update** – Dan King of the Immigration Resource Team introduced the members of the team. He reviewed the passage of the immigration resolution in 2019, and talked about the resources the team has developed. The team is now posting about immigration on the Ohio Conference Facebook page. Churches who would like guest speakers to talk about immigration should contact Dan King or Haroldo Nunes. The Immigration Resource Team is thinking about doing a book study in the fall. Dan expressed thanks to Matt Reed, pastor of Beech Mennonite Church, for his sermon series on immigration, and thanked others who are doing Bible studies on this topic.

Dick Barrett talked a bit about the MCC Borderlands Tour which he recently participated in. He would like to make it possible for people from the Ohio Conference to experience a borderlands tour.

A32. **Journey Graduation of Ramon Lianez** – Dick Barrett reviewed Ohio Conference’s work with the Journey Program at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana. This theological education program has participants from around the world. Two people from the Ohio Conference are exploring this opportunity starting this fall.

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, dean of lifelong learning at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, honored Ramon Lianez, the most recent Ohio Conference graduate of the Journey program. She gave Ramon a certificate of completion and free registration to AMBS’ next Pastors and Leaders event, as well as a subscription to the journal *Vision*. She also thanked Gary Stuckey, Ramon’s mentor, and presented him with a free registration to the next Pastors and Leaders event. She noted that Ramon has been a student representative on the Journey board. Dick Barrett presented Ramon with an oil lamp, and he led in a prayer of blessing for Ramon.

A33. **Vote on Trenton Mennonite Church** – Paula Snyder Belousek asked for a motion to receive Trenton Mennonite Church as a member of the Ohio Conference. The motion was made by Dee Custar, and seconded by Ken Sims. This action requires a 75 percent approval to be adopted. Delegates voted by paper ballot.

**A34. Constitutional Change Vote** – Dick Barrett shared the feedback from the table group discussion time yesterday. There was affirmation for adopting the new mission statement. Based on delegate feedback, the version of the mission statement that delegates will vote on includes a shortened preamble, deleting the words “as the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA.”

Mission statement:

We believe that Jesus Christ is at the center of who we are and all we do.

The mission of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA is to Gather, Equip and Send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out God’s Greatest Commandments<sup>1</sup> and Jesus’ Great Commission.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mark 12:29-31

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 28:18-20

A motion was made to adopt the new Ohio Conference mission statement and change the mission statement in the Ohio Conference Constitution. Motion was made by Joel Shenk and seconded by Sam Beiler. Two thirds of delegates must approve in order for this motion to be adopted.

**A35. Group Discernment and Table Talk** – Dick Barrett gave an introduction to the review process. Group discernment will require deep listening skills. Discernment is not easy, and it becomes exponentially more difficult with a group. He recommended Ruth Haley Barton’s book on group spiritual discernment titled *Pursuing God’s Will Together*.

Delegates were asked to discuss the following questions with their table groups:

- Describe a past spiritual discernment that you found to be effective.
- Name one Christian spiritual practice that you think would be helpful for us as a Conference to engage in over the next year of review that you too would be willing to engage in.

**A36. Open Mic** –

Lucas Johnson, Valley View Mennonite (Table 8) – Helpful spiritual disciplines include fasting and prayer, making time for silence and solitude, scripture reading, and listening to God ourselves.

Keith Lyndaker Schlabach, Millersburg Mennonite (Table 5) – Helpful spiritual disciplines include silent retreat, scripture and prayer, and time of debriefing after silence. It would be helpful to review what the Conference has experienced, possibly also having people from other conferences or denominations to walk alongside. They also recommended intentional active listening.

Joel Shenk, Toledo Mennonite (Table 11) – One helpful spiritual discipline is prayer. Perhaps we could have a daily Conference office (that is, a fixed hour of prayer). They encouraged empowering our leaders to bring us a clear, defined process. Let’s build on what we already have done.

Mel Hathaway, Sonnenberg Mennonite (Table 13) – His group listed some principles to keep in mind: We should have the opportunity to hear and repeat the issue clearly several times. They would emphasize the willingness to submit the individual will to the discernment process. They stressed the importance of defining the issue clearly and stating clearly what we are trying to resolve.

Corben Weaver Boshart, Zion Mennonite (Table 7) – His group suggested foot washing as way of recognizing that we often get proud in contentious situations. This practice is a way of embodying humility.

Jeff Roth, Lockport Mennonite (Table 3) – Helpful spiritual processes could include the circle process for discussion, appreciative inquiry process, prayer, using porches as observation posts, and foot washing.

Sean Swanson, First Mennonite (Table 14) – Helpful processes include self-differentiation and contemplative practices.

Sam Beiler, Toldeo Mennonite (Table 6) – Suggested helpful practices from his group included an inter-congregational outlook (how we as a Conference can come together) and shared prayer each month on this topic, as well as finding ways for members of congregations to have the opportunity to experience this circle process outside of just their own congregation.

Cheryl Vanatsky, Maple Grove Mennonite (New Castle, Pa.) (Table 15) – Suggested helpful practices were knowing the things of God versus the things of man, finding peace when you make a decision, silence before God, taking time, and not rushing.

Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler, Maple Grove Mennonite (Hartville) (Table 17) – His group would echo many of the things already expressed. One helpful process they identified is being intentional about reviewing commitments and covenants together. The goal should be to move toward Christ as one, with a commitment to each other.

Dan King (Table 12) – Some helpful ideas include the Quaker tradition of a listening committee, listening carefully to each other, and engaging an outside resource, Ruth Haley Barton's book that had been mentioned earlier. Another idea would be a monthly or weekly focusing on a particular aspect of our life together.

Matt Weaver, Lockport Mennonite (Table 9) – Potential helpful practices could include confession, as well as gathering to worship while we discern. We should be reminding ourselves of what brings us together.

Jared Chase, Sharon Mennonite (Table 4) – His group also would agree with many of the ideas expressed previously. Some other helpful practices would include breaking bread together regularly, practicing hospitality and getting to know each other better.

Haroldo Nunes (Open Arms Hispanic Ministries) – He praised the Lord for what he is seeing here, especially talking to each other with respect. Let's respect each other. He encouraged the Conference leadership not to make this discernment process drag on so that we lose the focus of why we are here.

**A37. Prayer Time** – Dan Hooley, Ohio Conference prayer coordinator, invited delegates to each identify people in their congregations who will be guiding the discernment process. He asked delegates to pray for each other's congregations and their discernment leaders. Delegates spent time in prayer.

**A38. Missional Story** – John Cargill of Salem Mennonite Church in Waldron, Michigan, shared the congregation's experience in partnering with the Red Cross. Salem Mennonite is a rural oasis in the middle of a hay field. In talking about Salem's experience, he also encouraged delegates to consider how their congregations can reach out to their communities. He suggested thinking about two main

questions: What does our community need? What do you have? (Possible answers might include money, land and facilities, time, and talent.)

Salem Mennonite has a new building that is fully accessible, and the congregation realized that it could be useful in a disaster situation. When disaster strikes, aid workers can be overwhelmed by displaced families. The congregation has partnered with the Red Cross and is on standby to be used for shelter of disaster victims. The partnership with the Red Cross has included a local blood drive, which has the benefit of introducing the church to neighboring individuals and first responders. In the case of a disaster, the Red Cross mobilizes trailers with supplies and personnel, and if the church building is needed, the Red Cross will staff the building around the clock, usually for a three- or four-day period, possibly up to two weeks. As another part of the partnership with the Red Cross, the church building can be used for Red Cross training meetings. He shared several resources, and recommended the website [www.do1thing.com](http://www.do1thing.com).

**A39. Pastors' Wives Retreat Announcement** – Dottie Hathaway of Sonnenberg Mennonite Church announced that the Pastors' Wives Retreat will be held Nov. 4-6 at the St. Francis Spirituality Center in Tiffin. A retreat brochure is available. This retreat offers an opportunity for women to process the experiences of being the spouse of a pastor. Several scholarships for this event are available.

**A40. Voting Results Announced** – Paula Snyder Belousek announced the results of voting on two issues:

**Delegates voted to accept Trenton Mennonite Church as a member of the Ohio Conference. Votes included 117 yes votes and one abstention.**

**Delegates voted unanimously to adopt the new mission statement and to include the new mission statement in the Ohio Conference Constitution, replacing the previous mission statement. There were 120 yes votes, and zero no votes.**

**A41. Announcements** – Paula Snyder Belousek shared several announcements.

**10-10:30 p.m. – Break/Displays/Snacks**

**10:30-11:30 p.m. – Worship**

**11:45 a.m.-1 p.m. – Lunch**

**1-2 p.m. – Workshops**

**2:10-3:30 p.m. – Business Session 4**

**A42. Announcements** – Paula Snyder Belousek announced the offering amount given during the worship service. The offering, which will benefit Project Hope and future missional conferences, totaled \$1641.01. Thirty-four congregations have been represented at ACA this year. The total number of ACA participants is 156, including 133 delegates.

**A43. Opening Prayer** – Hank Unruh, family life pastor at Salem Mennonite Church in Kidron, led delegates in an opening prayer.

**A44. Akron Church Partnership Resource Team** – Paula Snyder Belousek introduced the Akron Church Partnership Resource Team. This team has been working with the Congolese church in Akron. Team

members include Jacob Dodson, Ralph Reinford, Dick Barrett, Dan Jantzi, LaVerne Yousey, and Thomas Dunn.

**A45. Vote on Spending Plan** – Paula Snyder Belousek asked for a motion from the floor to approve the spending plan for 2022-23. The motion was made by Jared Chase and seconded by Vickie Yoder. Delegates voted by paper ballot.

**A46. Missional Resource Team** – Alex Dye reported on the work of the Missional Resource Team. In addition to Alex, current team members include Kevin Himes, Corben Weaver Boshart, Jeff Hochstetler, and Alysa Short. The team has been working on the Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI), which focuses on learning how to disciple others. The team is working on scheduling a new MDI cohort for this year, and Alex invited anyone interested in this training to check with Coordinator of Volunteers Alysa Short.

Sixteen Ohio Conference churches have participated in training for all three levels of MDI, and nine churches have had training for at least one level. There is an accountability group for those who have already had this training. It is being led by Karla Minter.

The Missional Resource Team also works to help plan the pre-ACA missional conference. The team has heard from the delegates that they wanted some hands-on, practical advice. For upcoming missional conferences, the team is looking for delegate input regarding the missional conference.

**A47. Group Discernment and Table Talk** – Dick Barrett introduced the group discernment time. We need to review the constitution, Conference structure, and denominational affiliation. Should we use an outside consultant to help with the review process? A facilitator would be able to interact with the Leadership Team, all the ministry teams, the delegates, and so on. This discernment will probably take more than one year, realistically. Dick estimated that the cost of engaging a consultant would be between \$40,000 and \$45,000, with that amount possibly split over two years.

Delegates were asked to consider the following questions in their groups:

- Would you affirm the use of an outside consultant?
- What questions and concerns do you have about using an outside consultant?
- Do you have any name suggestions (for constitution review, strategic planning, etc.)?

**A48. Open Mic** –

Dick Barrett – He noted that the Leadership Team would prefer a consultant who is not on the Leadership Team or any of the ministry teams. However, a consultant could possibly be related to one of the congregations in the Conference.

Darrin Snyder Belousek, Salem Mennonite (Elida) (Table 5) – His table group said yes to the idea of using an outside consultant. They would want someone they trust, who is qualified, and who shares our values and understands how the church works. They expect that there will be anxiety in this process. A good process is needed.

Ken Sims, Sharon Mennonite (Table 13) – His table group unanimously affirms the idea of using a consultant. They do have a concern that any consultant group used should have a strong Anabaptist background.

Lucas Johnson, Valley View Mennonite (Table 8) – His group had a question about what strategic planning for the future entails: Would it involve observing, reporting and recommending? In his group, four said yes to using a consultant, and two were unsure. On a personal level, he noted that using an outside consultant could alleviate hard feelings during this process.

Linda Riegsecker, West Clinton Mennonite (Table 14) – Her table group was unanimous in affirmation of using an outside consultant. Doing so would be a wise investment, allowing staff to focus on the new mission statement. A consultant could give perspective and expertise without emotional baggage.

Meredith Caldwell, Salem Mennonite (Waldron, Mich.) (Table 9) – Her table group was split in their decision about using a consultant. Even if we use a consultant, it should be Ohio Conference making the decisions. How are we relational if we can't make the decision ourselves?

Dick Barrett – The consultant would not make any final decisions. Final decisions would be made by the delegate body.

Chip Welch, Salem Mennonite (Elida) Table 4 – His group had six yeses for using a consultant, and one person unsure. Some questions: What is the end goal? What outcomes are expected?

Dick Barrett – One goal is clarity for our congregations about the process during the coming year. The strategic plan would be looking at the structure of the conference.

Sam Beiler, Toldeo Mennonite (Table 6) – What would the alternative to using a consultant look like? Would that include paid staff doing this work? His group would want a consultant who is Christian, but someone who does not lean one way or another. Will congregations trust someone from the outside? In his table group, two say yes to using a consultant, and two are unsure.

Doug Zehr, Oak Grove Mennonite (Smithville) (Table 18) – His table group has a lot of support for this idea. They had questions about the role of the consultant, and wanted clarity that the consultant would not be making the decisions.

Mary Spearman, Lee Heights Community Church (Table 15) – Her table group all affirmed hiring a consultant. One concern expressed was that whoever the consultant is should be engaging rather than dictatorial.

Bill Seymour, Orrville Mennonite (Table 7) – His table group had a concern about employing someone as a consultant with no connection with Ohio Conference. That person might not understand our context. Bill said he has been involved with a number of consultants who didn't work well for different reasons, such as the group was not clear, or the group did not do their part. There is opportunity for failure in this process.

Hank Unruh, Salem Mennonite (Kidron) (Table 16) – His group affirmed using a consultant. They had some questions: What if the consultant wants to talk with our congregations? Is that OK? What about if the consultant's timeline is longer?

Rebecca Kauffman, Bethel Mennonite (Table 11) – Her table group had a mix of opinions. The quality of consultants varies greatly. A neutral party is needed.

Nancy Yoder, West Clinton Mennonite (Table 12) – Her group was unanimous in support. There was a concern related to the consultant's neutrality, and they wondered what that concern says about us.

Dick Barrett noted that no one had asked how Conference would pay for a consultant. Funds could come from the Capacity Building Fund. In addition, Conference could possibly ask congregations to support the review process through above-budget giving.

**A49. Recognition of Persons Ending their Terms of Service and Recognition of Ralph Reinford's Service to the Conference** – Dick Barrett gave thanks to the many volunteers who help make the Ohio Conference work, giving special recognition to those who are completing their terms of service. Dick also thanked Paula Snyder Belousek for working as acting moderator as well as assistant moderator during much of the past year.

Dick also made special mention of Ken Sims, who will be beginning his term as moderator. In symbolic recognition of this service, Dick presented Ken with a towel and basin. Dick then led in prayer.

Ralph Reinford is retiring after 11 years as regional pastor and 36 years as a pastor. Dick presented Ralph a mug filled with words of affirmation from the delegates. He then led delegates in a prayer of thanks for Ralph.

**A50. Delegate Incentive Drawing** – There was a drawing for gift baskets for individuals who turned in the delegate checklist. Doug Zehr, Wes Graber, Ken Sims and Vickie Yoder won the gift baskets.

**A51. Words of Thanks** – Paula thanked staff members Judy King and Alysa Short for all their work in making this gathering possible. She also thanked the Zion congregation for the facility and the kitchen staff, and thanked the Missional Resource Team for putting together the missional conference.

**A52. Spending Plan Vote Announcement** – Paula announced the results of the spending plan vote:

**Delegates voted unanimously to adopt the proposed 2022-23 spending plan. All 103 ballots cast affirmed the plan.**

**A53. Closing Worship with Communion** – Dick led a time of communion with help from the pastoral staff.

**A54. Closing Words of Thanks and Prayer** – Paula gave closing words of thanks to delegates and asked for prayer for congregations, the Leadership Team and staff. She led delegates in a time of prayer.

**A55. Closing Song** – Bill Seymour led delegates in a final song, "Jesus Christ is Waiting."

Recorded by Ann Leaman