

Minutes of the 50th Annual Conference Assembly

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

Salem Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio

March 8-9, 2019

1:30-3 p.m. — Business Session #1

A1. Welcome — Moderator Bob Sauder welcomed delegates and expressed appreciation to the Missional Planning Team members for all their work on the missional conference which preceded Annual Conference Assembly. This weekend's event will include a celebration of 50 years of Annual Conference Assembly.

A2. Opening Prayer — Michael Danner, associate executive director for Church Vitality and Engagement for Mennonite Church USA, led an opening prayer.

A3. Opening Song — Alex Dye led delegates in an opening song, "We gather together."

A4. Minutes of the 2018 ACA — The moderator invited delegates to accept the minutes of the 2018 Annual Conference Assembly.

There was a motion to accept the minutes of the 2018 Annual Conference Assembly. M/S/C

A5. Introductions in Table Groups — Delegates introduced themselves to the other people in their table groups.

A6. Introduction and Blessing of New Pastors — Regional Pastors Ralph Reinford and Cliff Brubaker introduced pastors who have begun new assignments in the Ohio Conference during the past year. Pastors who have started new assignments include Rebecca Kauffman, Bethel Mennonite in West Liberty; Ryan Harker, West Clinton Mennonite in Wauseon; Andy Stoner, transitional pastor at Oak Grove Mennonite in West Liberty; Jared Chase, formerly an associate pastor at Sharon Mennonite Church in Plain City who has been called to serve as lead pastor at Sharon; Dorothy Ritchey-Moore and Erin Ladd, interim pastors at Salem Mennonite Church in Waldron, Michigan; Sheila Spencer Anderson, University Euclid Christ New Testament Church in Cleveland; Alvis Pettker, Friendship Mennonite Church in Bedford Heights; Walt Morton, transitional pastor at Berlin Mennonite Church; Joel Miller, Salem Mennonite Church in Wooster; and Dan Hooley, intentional interim at LifeBridge Community Church in Dover. In addition, two other individuals were licensed for ministry: Lucas Johnson of Valley View Mennonite Church in Spartansburg, Pennsylvania; and Hardaye Ramjit of Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland. Conference Minister Dick Barrett led a prayer of blessing for these individuals.

A7. Sending and Blessing of Congregations — Conference Minister Dick Barrett noted that as the writer of Ecclesiastes says in chapter 3, verses 1-8, "For everything there is a season." He invited the delegates to pause to lament the leaving of several congregations from the Ohio Conference. Chestnut Ridge Mennonite Church in Orrville and Berean Fellowship Church in Youngstown have closed. New Mercies Community Church in Burton and Kidron Mennonite Church have chosen to no longer to affiliate with

the Ohio Conference. Jubilee Mennonite Church in Bellefontaine is transferring its membership to the Central District Conference.

Dick Barrett reported that Kidron Mennonite Church Pastor Carl Wiebe offered words of blessing and appreciation for the Ohio Conference. Karla Kauffman of Jubilee Mennonite Church read a letter from the congregation. This is a bittersweet moment; the congregation hopes to remain in relationship with others in the Ohio Conference. The process of changing conferences has happened over the past year and a half. Jubilee is grateful to the Conference for its support over the years. The congregation is choosing to be affirming of LGBTQ persons.

Dick Barrett led the delegates in reading a litany of lament and blessing for the departing congregations.

A8. Introduction of Resolutions Committee — Bob Sauder introduced the members of the Resolutions Committee: Jeff Hochstetler, Jamie Rye, and Mary Spearman.

A9. Introduction and Action on Gifts Discernment Slate — Mel Hathaway, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, introduced the Gifts Discernment ballot. He thanked the members of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, and he invited people to give suggestions for people to fill positions. The delegates applauded those who have given their time to the work of the Ohio Conference. Mel led the delegates in prayer, and then the delegates completed their ballots.

A10. ACA Celebration Time — Matt Weaver, associate pastor at Lockport Mennonite Church in Stryker, introduced the ACA celebration time, which consisted of a trivia competition between table groups. Before explaining the logistics of the competition, he pointed out the 50th anniversary display, and he invited delegates to write words of encouragement for Conference Minister Dick Barrett and Mennonite Church USA Executive Director Glen Guyton.

For the ACA celebration, the table groups were asked to answer several multiple-choice questions. Matt Weaver noted that there would be a round of four questions during each business session. The first round of questions was about Conference Minister Dick Barrett.

A11. Proposed Constitutional Changes — Bob Sauder noted that most of the proposed changes to the Ohio Conference Constitution are minor changes in wording. The section about Choice Books was eliminated because the Conference no longer is involved with the Choice Books ministry. Bob asked for questions or comments about the proposed changes to the constitution.

Ballots were on the tables, and delegates marked their ballots. A two-thirds majority is required to make changes to the Constitution.

The vote totals were as follows: Yes — 135; No — 1; Abstain — 1. **The changes to the Ohio Conference Constitution were approved.**

A12. Missional Story — Darwin Hartman, pastor of Pike Mennonite Church in Elida, told about the addiction ministry taking place at Pike. Between six and eight months ago the church started a class for drug addicts. He noted that many Ohio communities are dealing with drug use; in fact, Ohio is in the top five states when it comes to rates of drug abuse. The rate of drug overdoses in Ohio is 32 per 100,000 people. He pointed to the spiritual part of this problem, and noted that Jesus worked his way into people's lives through physical needs. The course at Pike uses the book *Addicts at the Cross*, which uses a nine-step program.

A13. **Table Discussion** — Moderator Bob Sauder invited delegates to discuss two questions in response to the missional story which had been shared: “What did you hear that really got you excited? What did you hear that triggered an idea that you could use in your setting?”

A14. **Introduction of Conference Visitors** — Bob Sauder introduced visitors to ACA, including guests from the Akron Swahili Community Church and Rollin Mukanza from the International Institute of Akron.

A15. **Announcements** — Jennifer Hartzler made two announcements for the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale Board, and Kevin Himes, pastor at Salem Mennonite Church in Kidron, welcomed delegates and gave some announcements.

3-3:30 p.m. — Break/Displays/Snacks

3:30-4:30 p.m. — Business Session #2

A16. **Opening Song** — Alex Dye led delegates in singing “Guide my feet.”

A17. **Prayer** — Karla Minter, church relations representative for Mennonite Mission Network, talked about contemplative prayer. What is God doing in our midst? In contemplative prayer, we need to show up, pay attention, cooperate with God, and then release the outcome. She led delegates in prayer.

A18. **Gifts Discernment Vote Results** — Of 137 votes cast for the Gifts Discernment ballot, 134 affirmed the entire ballot, and three affirmed individuals on the ballot. **Therefore, all individuals on the ballot were affirmed for service.**

A19. **ACA Celebration Time** — Matt Weaver led delegates in another trivia competition as part of the ACA Celebration. Table groups answered questions about Glen Guyton, executive director of Mennonite Church USA.

A20. **Introduction of Mennonite Church USA Executives** — Dick Barrett mentioned that he attended the Constituency Leaders Council meeting during the previous week. He introduced Michael Danner and Glen Guyton.

Glen Guyton briefly shared about his personal history and how he became part of the Mennonite Church. He gave a brief overview of what is going on in Mennonite Church USA. Currently there are 65,000 members of Mennonite Church USA, and there are 558 congregations and about 35 church plants. MC USA is looking to develop resources related to church planting. Glen also reviewed the Mennonite Church USA structure, including the program agencies. The Executive Board acts between delegate sessions. Conferences have a lot of autonomy in the denominational structure. MC USA and its agencies are working at equipping congregations and leaders.

A21. **Introduction of the 2019-20 Spending Plan** — Dean Falb, co-chair of the Stewardship Ministry, presented the proposed Ohio Conference spending plan for 2019-20. At the end of January, the Conference had a positive operating balance of \$21,000. He introduced Conference staff members and noted that the Conference has not had to transfer any money from capital funds this year. The Conference is going into this coming fiscal year fully staffed. During the current fiscal year, spending has

been \$20,000-30,000 under budget because the Conference has not been fully staffed during the entire year.

A22. Table Discussion — Delegates were given opportunity to talk about the proposed spending plan in their table groups.

A23. Open Mic —

Jeff Hochstetler (Table 19) — When is the end of the fiscal year? (Answer: March 31.)

Jamie Rye — Why is there no money in the spending plan for church planting?

Dean Falb — This spending plan covers operating expenses, but the Stewardship Ministry is open to any new initiatives. In the past, endowment funds have been used for church planting.

Matt Weaver (Table 3) — His table group wondered why line 5 (consulting for pastoral misconduct) included \$7,000 in spending during this fiscal year, but no funds are budgeted for this item for 2019-2020. He thinks it would be better to have at least something budgeted for dealing with any possible misconduct situations.

Dean Falb and Bob Sauder — This spending was for a consultant who helped to work through the misconduct process while the Conference was without a Conference minister. The consultant was able to take over some of these duties so that the regional pastors were not overburdened. Now that a Conference minister is in place, he will take over most of those functions in the event that other cases of misconduct occur. Healthy Boundaries training fees will help to raise funds for working with congregations which are dealing with misconduct.

Bill Seymour — Should we add some funding for dealing with other sexual misconduct cases if they would occur?

Dick Barrett — The spending during this fiscal year was for consulting on how to follow the process for dealing with sexual misconduct.

Bob Sauder — If additional funds are needed for dealing with a misconduct case, the Leadership Team will work with the Stewardship Ministry to arrange for funding, possibly using endowment funds.

Jared Chase — Regarding Line 6 of the spending plan, which is designated for the Ministry Inquiry Program: Should we increase the funds going toward this program? The cost is \$500 per student, and we are only budgeting \$500 for this program in this year's spending plan.

A24. Missional Story — Ryan Nafziger, associate pastor of Tedrow Mennonite Church, told about Tedrow's Homework Help program. The congregation started its homework table in November 2017. They started with four volunteers. Now they usually average about 12 students and six helpers who meet every Tuesday. In addition to working on homework, they also have puzzles, games, and educational activities for the students. As part of the program, they took students on a trip to the Toledo Zoo. The church received funding assistance for this trip through a grant from the Ohio Conference Ministry Development Team.

A25. Prayer — Dick Barrett had Dee Custar, pastor at Salem Mennonite Church in Waldron, Michigan, lead a prayer for Bob Sauder, who is undergoing chemotherapy for lymphoma.

A26. **Announcements** — Dick Barrett made several announcements.

5-6 p.m. — Workshops

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

7:30-9 p.m. —Worship

9 p.m. — Reception for Dick Barrett and Glen Guyton

Saturday, March 9, 2019

7-8 a.m. — Mennonite Men’s Breakfast and Mennonite Women’s Breakfast

8:10-8:25 a.m. — Prayer Time

8:30-10 a.m. — Business Session #3

A27. **Announcements** — Bob Sauder made several announcements. Attendance at the Friday evening worship service was 191, and the offering total was \$3,500.34. Bob also gave thanks for the prayer for him on Friday.

A28. **Opening Song** — Kevin Himes led delegates in an opening song, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.”

A29. **Opening Prayer** — Bob Sauder led delegates in an opening prayer.

A30. **ACA Celebration Time** — Matt Weaver announced table group scores from Friday and then led the delegates in another brief quiz, this time about Ohio Conference history.

A31. **ACA 50 Years Conversation** — Bob Sauder discussed the past 50 years of the Ohio Conference with two long-time pastors, Eldon King and David Tijerina. They shared their memories of the Ohio Conference, reflected on some of the changes which have taken place in the past 50 years, and gave some advice for members of Ohio Conference congregations.

A32. **Introduction to Immigration Resolution** — Coordinator of Volunteers Alysa Short, one of the members of the Immigration Resource Team, introduced the other members of the team — Dan King, Hannah Troyer, Kelsey Troyer, and Mara Weaver Boshart. Alysa gave some history of the formation of the proposed immigration resolution. (A copy of this resolution is included at the end of these minutes.) She also drew attention to Mennonite Mission Network’s *Missio Dei* booklets about immigration which were available for delegates.

Mara Weaver Boshart talked about the introduction to this resolution, noting that the team wants to create a conversation around immigration. Hannah Troyer drew attention to the resource sheet, sample letter and list of Ohio elected officials with their contact information.

Dan King talked about his work with immigrants. He noted that the team appreciated feedback from delegates at cluster meetings. The Leadership Team has decided not to allow amendments to this

resolution. If the resolution passes, the responsibility to contact elected officials will lie with delegates and congregations; there will not be an official Conference letter to political officials. Dan recommended the book *Welcoming the Stranger* by Soerens and Yang. He noted that congregations who would like to have someone come to speak about immigration should contact him or Haroldo Nunes.

A33. Table Group Discussion — Delegates discussed the proposed resolution in their table groups.

A34. Open Mic —

Paula Snyder Belousek (Table 10) — She gave strong affirmation for the Immigration Resource Team, especially for the background work prior the resolution. We can all gather around the idea that all are created in the image of God.

Dan Hooley (Table 9) — The team did a wonderful job of developing this proposal. We recognize that the finer points of political debate and details of working at immigration are very complicated, but these are not necessarily questions that the church is responsible to answer. Government should be held accountable.

Alex Dye (Table 4) — He thanked the team for their hard work on this resolution. His table group noted that they represent not only themselves but also their congregations. Many in our congregations have fear related to immigration and may be on the conservative end of the political spectrum. There was some discussion about how to approach questions of illegal vs. legal immigration (undocumented vs. documented). How do we educate people on the barriers that immigrants face? The resources provided are a great conversation starter. Personal stories are valuable.

Walt Morton (Table 13) — He expressed a deep appreciation for the work that has been done. He is thankful for the wording “consider how we might help improve economic and humanitarian conditions in countries of origin in order to reduce the pressure to emigrate.” How can we as a nonviolent people work toward reconciliation in those countries?

Haroldo Nunes (Open Arms Hispanic Ministry) — He expressed thanks to the Ohio Conference for welcoming him as a stranger. We should see people as human beings. In the past our ancestors were immigrants. We shouldn’t say that now that we’re here, we need to keep others out. He supports the resolution, and he is available to come to congregations to speak about immigration.

Dan King — In response to a previous comment about legal vs. illegal immigration, he quoted attorney Jeff Stewart who works with the Immigrant Worker Project in Canton. He noted that Stewart said that the level of illegality or criminality of crossing the border without permission is comparable to that of receiving a speeding ticket.

David Tijerina (Table 12) — This resolution is well written, but it is just paper. What happens after we read it? He reflected on his experience of being a Hispanic citizen of the United States. This is not a new problem. We can welcome immigrants.

William Troyer (Table 7) — His table group appreciated the time and effort put into this resolution, as well as the resources. They felt that the sample letter for people to send to elected officials needs a good, solid conclusion which mirrors the first sentence of the letter.

Bob Sauder encouraged delegates to write to elected officials. He noted that delegates would vote on the immigration resolution during the next business session.

A35. “Sent” Initiative Report — Jacob Dodson, pastor of Wooster Mennonite Church, presented information about the Missional Planning Team. The team’s areas of focus include missional stories, missional training, missional coaching, and church planting. There were 85 participants in this year’s missional training conference, which focused on the role of legacy churches in starting new expressions of outreach. The team is planning a summer missional event next year. It will take place June 26-28, 2020, at Bluffton University. “Everyday Missionaries” is the proposed theme.

The Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI) has come to the Conference through Mennonite Mission Network (MMN). MDI helps congregations to work at deeper discipleship. Church planting is important, and we need to pray for opportunities for church planting to happen. MMN is developing the SENT Network which will focus on church planting.

Jacob also noted that two Missional Planning Team members, Paula Snyder Belousek and Joel Shenk, are transitioning off the team because they have accepted other Conference assignments. Other members of the team include Corben Boshart, Jamie Rye, and Alysa Short.

A36. Plans for 2020 ACA and Missional Conference — Bob Sauder noted that in 2020 Annual Conference Assembly will be a one-day meeting in March. He requested that any delegates who would be willing to work on plans for the summer missional gathering should please volunteer. He also encouraged delegates to submit topics that they would be interested in discussing at the summer missional gathering.

A37. Announcements — Dick Barrett shared several announcements.

10-10:45 a.m. — Break/Displays/Snacks

10:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m. — Worship

12:30-1:30 p.m. — Lunch

1:30-3:30 p.m. — Business Session #4

A38. Open Song — Alex Dye led an opening song, “Be Thou my vision.”

A39. Opening Prayer — Meg Short from Bluffton University led delegates in an opening prayer.

A40. Spending Plan Vote — Delegates voted on the spending plan by paper ballot.

One hundred thirty votes were cast, and the spending plan received 100 percent affirmation.

A41. ACA Celebration Time — Matt Weaver announced table group scores from the previous business session and then led the delegates in another brief quiz, this time based on the Annual Report Book.

A42. Missional Story — Haroldo Nunes told delegates about a Marriage Enrichment Retreat sponsored by Open Arms Hispanic Ministry with support from an Ohio Conference Ministry Development Team

grant. This retreat, which took place Sept. 28-30 in Berlin, Ohio, used leaders from Worldwide Marriage Encounter and focused on communication skills. Fourteen couples participated, and the retreat was a bilingual experience with Raul Tadeo providing Spanish translation. The Worldwide Marriage Encounter manual is now translated in Spanish. They would like to sponsor an encounter in the Sinaloa area of Mexico in 2020. Haroldo thanked Ohio Conference, Venture Products, Salem Mennonite Church, Crown Hill Mennonite Church, and Mark and Dallas Steiner for their financial support.

A43. **Immigration Vote** — Delegates voted on the proposed immigration resolution by paper ballot. Of 138 votes cast, 131 voted yes, 4 voted no, and 3 abstained (95 percent approval).

The immigration resolution was approved with 95 percent of delegates voting for the resolution.

A44. **Gathered Initiative Report** — Conference Minister Dick Barrett reported on the “Gathered” initiative of the Conference. He gave several reminders about the Mennonite Church USA Convention this summer. Since 2017, the Conference has been working on “Gathered and Sent.” The main focus of the “Gathered” initiative is to help us tend to our center as a Conference. We have been working on developing a covenant which includes our core values and spiritual practices as Anabaptist congregations, as well as procedures for working on our differences. We recognize that we don’t all agree, but God calls us to covenant in living together. We have been studying scriptures together. Credentialed ministers held all-day gatherings in November and February, studying scriptures together. They reaffirmed *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995).

The credentialed ministers also identified issues of disagreement, but the majority decided that none of these issues should prevent the group from moving forward on developing a covenant. They realized that a lot of good work already has been done in the area of working through disagreements. For example, Central Plains Mennonite Conference has developed a covenant which includes both core beliefs and practices to follow. The credentialed ministers also looked at an Ohio Conference document developed in 1998 titled “Procedures for Responding to Tension-Producing Differences Within Ohio Conference.” A resource team may be formed to do more work, using these documents as a starting point.

A45. **Pastor-Spouse Retreat Introduction** — Sue Short and Jamie Rye, both members of the resource team planning the upcoming Pastor-Spouse Retreat told delegates about plans for the retreat, which will take place Nov. 15-17 at the Mills Park Hotel in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Other members of the planning team include Alysa Short and Bill Seymour. Pastors and their spouses will have time for rest, rejuvenation, and reconnection. The retreat will offer time for participants to take part in optional hiking and arts activities. There also will be a time for a coffeehouse, and chances for connecting and sharing.

A46. **Mennonite Mission Network** — Karla Minter, church relationship representative for Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), talked to delegates about the relationship between MMN and the Ohio Conference. She thanked delegates and quoted from her report. Ohio Conference is capturing the imagination of the new Anabaptist Church. The Conference is the top contributor to MMN. Jodi Miller of Berlin Mennonite Church is on the MMN board. Karla mentioned some of the MMN workers who receive support from Ohio Conference congregations: Toni and Matthew Krabill in France (continuing the legacy of Neil and Janie Blough), Dale and Bethsaba Nafziger in Nepal, Dariush and Emily Meraj, Laura Schlabaugh and [REDACTED] in Mongolia, Brian and Noelia Fox in Spain, and Jose and Alfonsina Oyanguren in the Argentinian Chaco.

Karla commended the delegates for the direction the Ohio Conference has been taking in the past several years. She reminded delegates about the passage of the healthy budget two years ago and the positive energy that surrounded that decision. Around that same time, Ohio Conference congregations began participating in MMN's Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI). Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty was the first Ohio Conference congregation to participate in MDI.

A47. Missional Story — Joel Shenk, pastor of Toledo Mennonite, told about the program "Forging Peace; Beating Guns," which has been taking place in Toledo. This program is a response to gun violence. In 2016 Toledo Mennonite Church and several partner groups held a Guns to Garden Tools event featuring Mike Martin of Raw Tools. Since then they have held four subsequent demonstrations with a local blacksmith. Last summer they received a donation of 22 guns by a collector. The guns were used in an introduction to blacksmithing class which also included some peace education. This movement began with some seed money from an Ohio Conference Ministry Grant. Joel said that he will be taking blacksmithing training during his sabbatical, and he would like to be able to "take the [blacksmithing] show on the road." He also mentioned that Mike Martin of Raw Tools and Shane Claiborne are on book tour to promote their new book, *Beating Guns*.

A48. Table Group Discussion — In their table groups, delegates discussed the following questions: What did you hear that really got you excited? What did you hear that triggered an idea that you could use in your setting?

A49. Open Mic —

Paula Snyder Belousek (Table 10) — Her table group would like Joel Shenk to do a blacksmithing demonstration for Ohio Conference once he is done with his training.

Conrad Yoder (Table 11) — He has been grieving the loss of Jubilee Mennonite Church. The Jubilee congregation has affirmed the LGBTQ community, and that decision was a significant part of the reason that they left the Conference. In 2015 at the denominational convention delegates passed a forbearance resolution. (Note: That resolution "calls those in Mennonite Church USA to offer grace, love and forbearance towards conferences, congregations and pastors in our body who, in different ways, seek to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ on matters relating to same-sex covenanted unions.") There is not a lot of forbearance in the Ohio Conference on this topic right now, although there is forbearance on other topics, such as women in leadership and extremely wealthy people. It is much easier to extend forbearance to those who are like us than those who are different. He worries that we are dividing into factions in different conferences, and he expressed the hope that these divisions are not what forbearance looks like. All are diminished by such separations.

Bob Sauder led the delegates in prayer for guidance and strength.

Regional Pastor Cliff Brubaker responded to Conrad Yoder's comments, talking about working with Jubilee during the congregation's discernment process. He said that the congregation did not receive a threat of investigation during this process. He grieves Jubilee's departure, and he stated that he was not sure that there wasn't room in the Conference for Jubilee.

A50. ACA Celebration Time Results — Matt Weaver reported results of the ACA celebration time contest. The results were as follows: Tables 9 and 20 — fifth place; Tables 5 and 6 — third place; Table 10 — second place; and Table 15 — first place.

A51. **Drawing for Delegate Incentives** — There was a drawing for gift baskets for individuals who turned in the delegate checklist. Joel Shenk, Myron Ramseyer, Jeff Wyse, and Dennis Graber received these gift baskets. In addition, Jennifer Hartzler of Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville was the winner of a gift basket provided by Mennonite Mutual.

A52. **Announcements** — Alysa Short made several announcements, including an announcement about the upcoming ACA highlight video. Bob Sauder announced that 204 people attended ACA, including delegates from 37 congregations. He thanked Sally Schreiner Youngquist and Steve North, and those who helped with food service. He also thanked staff members Judy King, Alysa Short and Ann Leaman, as well as representatives from Mennonite Church USA, members of the Stewardship Ministry and the Immigration Resource Team.

A53. **Presentation of Pottery** — Bob Sauder presented pottery vessels filled with messages of blessing to Dick Barrett and Glen Guyton.

A54. **Closing Song** — Alex Dye and Alan Kauffman led delegates in a closing song, “Praise God from whom.”

A55. **Words of Blessing** — Glen Guyton shared a final blessing based on Romans 5.

RESOLUTION ON IMMIGRATION

Background

As we consider the multifaceted and complex issue of Immigration, we wish to discern and follow the guidance of Scripture and the Holy Spirit. As the Body of Christ, we are called to offer a particular witness to the world, including the government. It is for the sake of the Body, its witness, and the unity for which it must strive, that we offer this resolution. The purpose of this resolution is not to convince, to draw dividing lines, nor to solidify political affiliations. This resolution is meant as an invitation to this part of the Church—Ohio Mennonite Conference—to work at finding a Third Way, rooted in the good news of Jesus Christ, on an issue that divides the culture around us. This is an opportunity to ask ourselves how we will be distinct from the hatred and polarization that surrounds us. This is an opportunity to ask how Christ holds us together and calls us to extend his Kingdom.

We believe that any discussion of immigration should include, at minimum, these truths: human beings as created in God’s image, the biblical call to compassionate and just treatment of “foreigners” (Lev. 19:33-34), the specific teachings of Jesus (Matt. 25:35-40), and the world-wide nature of the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:19). Our Confession of Faith states that “the church knows no geographical boundaries and needs no violence for its protection.” While Scripture commands us to respect and pray for those in authority, it also calls us to give our ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, above “any human authority.” (*Confession of Faith*, Article 23)

See also these Scriptures: Acts 11:1-18; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:26-28; Mark 3:33-35; Deut. 10:19; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:19; Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:20; Jer. 29:7; Rev. 11:15; Deut. 27:19; Exod. 22:21, 23:9; Ezk. 22:7

Resolution

Individual component:

As delegates to Ohio Mennonite Conference, we commit ourselves to become better informed on the issues surrounding immigration, with a willingness to consider a variety of perspectives. Regardless of our own national origin, we will seek to reach out and build relationships with our neighbors, rooted in Christ’s love and compassion.

Congregational component:

As members of Ohio Mennonite Conference congregations, we will encourage our churches: a) to become better informed on immigration issues, b) to promote healthy dialogue in group settings, and c) to pray for the Spirit's leading in seeking to minister to the needs of immigrants within our congregations and our communities. We call on our churches to take the risks involved in obeying Christ's call to "welcome the stranger." We recognize the benefits of doing so, such as the richness of multi-cultural diversity, the revitalization of our congregations, and opportunities for missional outreach. We will seek to understand the underlying causes of immigration and consider how we might help improve economic and humanitarian conditions in countries of origins in order to reduce the pressure to emigrate. In addition, we will encourage our churches and individual members to contact their elected officials at local, state, and national levels to express our views on immigration.