

To: Ohio Conference Credentialed Ministers, Congregational Delegates, Members and Attendees
From: Ohio Conference Leadership Team
Subject: Update on Review Process
Date: Nov. 7, 2022

At our Annual Conference Assembly (ACA) on March 4-5, 2022, Ohio Conference delegates affirmed the use of a consultant to help us with strategic planning, including visioning for the future and reviewing our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). The review in affiliation is due to a resolution passed by the Ohio Conference delegate body on March 25, 2017. That resolution stated, “We will continue our affiliation with MC USA with one of three changes that would trigger a review of that affiliation: 1) A substantive change in the Confession of Faith; 2) A substantive change in the Membership Guidelines of MC USA; 3) A change in policy or practice at the national level that would require Ohio Conference to recognize the credentials of pastors who have performed same-sex marriages or who are involved themselves in a same-sex relationship.”

While at ACA this past March we did not know what would take place at MC USA’s special delegate assembly on May 27-30, 2022, we felt there was the likelihood that the Membership Guidelines of MC USA would at least be retired. Actions by MC USA’s delegates retired the Membership Guidelines and later rescinded them in the *Resolution for Repentance and Transformation*. The process to bring that resolution, as well as its language and actions called for, fit the provision to review our affiliation with MC USA.

In April, our process consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi from Design Group International, began meeting with our constituents. She met with the Leadership Team and pastoral staff, our active credentialed ministers, and our congregational delegates in regional cluster meetings, concluding on Oct. 4, 2022. This first part of the review process centered on receiving feedback in three main areas: 1) God’s purpose and vision for Ohio Conference based on our new mission statement – *to Gather, Equip and Send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out God’s Greatest Commandments and Jesus’ Great Commission*; 2) the things that Ohio Conference brings to our credentialed ministers and congregations that are most appreciated; and 3) options for future affiliation.

The well-attended meetings led to a widespread recognition that not all Ohio Conference congregations or members of individual congregations are in agreement regarding affiliation with MC USA. Participants in the various meetings expressed strong appreciation for Ohio Conference’s support structures, pastor peer groups, regional pastors, and the geographic proximity that allows for close networking.

All the feedback from those groups has been compiled and is being prayerfully reviewed by our Strategic Planning Team – Dick Barrett, Conference Minister; Michelle Steffen, Sonnenberg Mennonite Church; Joel Shenk, pastor at Toledo Mennonite Church; and Tyson Stuckey, Central Mennonite Church.

With our consultant facilitating, the Strategic Planning Team met for the first time on Oct. 29, 2022, in Upper Sandusky. The initial focus of the Strategic Planning Team will be to follow up on the feedback we have received about vision, purpose, and those things which are most important to our credentialed ministers and congregations. The team also will gather more solid information about the various options and explore how that information fits with the affiliation options that were shared. It is the goal of the Strategic Planning Team to have two or three viable options for delegates to consider. Delegates will have another time of discernment at our next round of cluster meetings scheduled for January 2023. This plan will provide time for further refinement of the options before the Annual Conference Assembly on March 3–4, 2023, at Central Christian School in Kidron.

As the Leadership Team of Ohio Conference continues to pray for our pastors, congregational leaders and congregations, we ask that you continue to keep us and our other Conference leaders in your prayers as well, as we continue to discern together where God may be leading us in the years ahead. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to anyone from the Leadership Team.