

Hopes and Fears
Responses from Delegates
Ohio Conference Annual Conference Assembly
March 3, 2023

In the first session of the Annual Conference Assembly, Delegates were asked, *“As you, as a delegate, look at these two scenarios, what are your hopes for Ohio Conference? What are your fears for Ohio Conference?”*

The following responses from delegates help in understanding feelings (Red Hat) and will provide useful guidance on how to best design the next steps of the Strategic Planning Process (Blue Hat). The responses are under the two headings of Hopes and Fears and have been loosely categorized within each heading.

Hopes

Relationships/ Unity/ Diversity

- No hard feelings no matter what happens
- Unity without uniformity of belief
- Provide witness to the world of unity in Christ
- Agree to disagree
- Don't divide over one issue
- Recognize we are all trying to follow Christ
- Keep diversity and the balance that it brings
- Unity in the conference and congregations
- Stay together as a conference
- No matter what we will be welcoming congregations
- We commit to the family we are in. All families have problems
- Re-establish trust
- Able to reconcile
- Model love despite differences
- A sense of unity would be found
- Accept others for who they are and who they are not
- Be able to dialogue and maintain unity with those with differing opinions without needing to separate
- Remain on good terms no matter the outcome
- Our decision making would reflect a unified body of Christ
- Remain together, or at least remain in fellowship
- For congregations to remain with the conference
- God-honoring in our discussions. Never going to be complete agreement. Respect and love
- Any separation is done well
- Maintain Ohio Conference unity
- Healthy communication
- United and continued expression of love
- Desire for unity
- Content in disagreeing
- Come out of this with a sense of clarity
- People will hear each other clearly and see each other in a positive light
- Mutual respect, no finger-pointing
- Congregation stay in Ohio Conference

- Cohesiveness
- Move forward unified
- Willingness to hold tension - can discuss disagreements and still be together
- To preserve fellowship in the conference
- That we will love each other whether or not we disagree
- That we will respect each other whether or not we agree
- Be together, unity of difference
- Move toward each other
- Consensus
- Choose each other over choosing a position
- Togetherness despite differences
- Stay connected to something larger than ourselves global
- Lean into
- Stay together. Grow as a body. Work on concerns together
- Not another Martins Creek
- Relationships and discussion continue
- Build community for those who don't know
- Peace people
- Ohio Conference remain united in spite of different understandings of the mysteries of sexuality
- Can stay together
- That staying together will bring unity
- More churches will stay in Ohio Conference
- Clear consensus and fewer casualties
- Walk together
- United
- Communicate and listen
- Ohio Conference can still support churches
- Congregations in Ohio Conference can stay
- Hold conference together relationships important
- We can find ways to remain United
- We can live together within our differences
- Ohio Conference can become more diverse, not just white and rural

Autonomy

- Ohio Conference can keep autonomy
- Don't worry about guilt by association
- To remain focused on Ohio Conference interests

Forward Motion

- If we make a decision, we can move forward
- Develop goals to rally around
- Move on from the conversation and focus on service
- More clarity
- To preserve and continue the dialogue
- More clarity
- A toxic process wouldn't continue
- A way to peace and safety no matter the decision

- Wish that there would be an acknowledgment that many were energized and positive when we came
- That our filter for discernment is does it point to Jesus?
- To be focused on biblical teaching and decisions rather than on logistics
- Clarity of sense of direction / resolution
- Opportunity for new growth
- Move forward with mission, evangelism, discipleship
- Excitement
- OMC will continue to support all congregations
- A way forward
- Seen as a collective decision and that loss is small
- Refocus on mission
- Clear direction
- Follow God's leading
- Renewed sense of vision and direction
- Focus on building Christ Kingdom and love
- Come together in peace with excitement
- Provide clarity
- To represent the gospel very well
- We will glorify God
- Find a clearer mandate
- Delegates come to clear sense of direction
- Don't bleed congregations
- Acceptance for all people
- Mission effectiveness and energy
- Go on a trip of discovery about the mysteries of sexuality despite the fear of how it will affect our families
- Maintain justice, biblical authority, and honoring of scripture
- Our ability to do things together could continue, for example MCC and other initiatives and worship together
- Potentially lifting scripture higher
- Staying true to Jesus
- Show love to all
- Open to learning/growth
- Outward-facing conference
- Follow the Holy Spirit
- We hear a clear direction from God
- We continue growing into the full measure of God's love
- Rational decisions
- Clear directions/decisions

Hopes specifically related to vote

- Stay with MC USA to keep critical mass and resources
- Stay with MC USA
- If leaving MC USA, we take the proper time to make decisions
- Find a new organization that will help
- Have a decisive outcome
- If scenario two passes, we hope we have the energy and finances to implement it
- To remain with Mennonite Church USA for the benefits we receive
- To be in a conference that is established
- Leave Mennonite Church USA

- More openness to either scenario
- Reach consensus and leave happy
- That we can be more decisive
- Come out with a clearer sense of what affiliation can be
- Still continue to be a witness within MC USA
- With scenario 2 excitement of a new thing
- That we would leave MC USA
- 2 to 3 years of discernment to give us more direction
- some
- We come out of this with a belief in MC USA leadership
- Get to a 2/3 vote

Fears

Loss of Congregations

- Ohio Conference will fall apart
- Loss of churches, people, identity, and focus no matter what
- Conference will fear the future
- Splits in conferences and congregations
- Lose 25 to 33% of congregations
- More splintering loss of conference and congregational membership
- No matter the vote, congregations will leave and we will continue to be diminished as a Conference
- Losing churches
- Long-term viability of Ohio Conference if it shrinks
- Churches losing members
- Any separation is done poorly
- Further fragmentation
- Will this be the end of Ohio Conference?
- Churches leaving
- People leaving
- No matter what happens, loss occurs
- People let their fears get in the way of being in community with those who see things differently
- The number of congregations that may leave Ohio Conference
- There will not be clarity, and it will cause unraveling
- The longer we delay, the more there will be unraveling because of lack of decisiveness
- Endless processing will create more unraveling
- A slow death
- Disintegration, undoing of Ohio Conference
- People who disagree will leave anyway
- All minds are made up and it causes a church split
- More will leave with either decision
- Creation of more stress in individual congregations
- Ohio Conference fractures due to different understandings of sexuality
- Lose a number of churches and center of gravity will shift
- Conference won't hold together
- Lose more congregations
- Splits will come despite the outcome
- Ohio Conference emerges as a weaker conference despite the outcome

Loss of Autonomy

- MCUSA will override Ohio Conference autonomy
- We are acting out of unfair / untimely pressure from MC USA
- Wondering where will MC USA go with the resolution passed in May 2022
- If we remain with MC USA, will we be continually drawn into controversy
- Disregard of conference

Pain/discomfort/ tension

- Pain in our congregations
- Tensions will continue indefinitely
- Lack of focus on mission
- We will be right back here discussing a different decision by MC USA at some point
- We will continue waiting for the next thing to happen that will want to make us leave the family
- Too focused on one issue
- There will be enmity between MC USA and Ohio Conference
- The vote itself will create winners and losers
- A toxic environment would continue
- Could create exclusion
- Creating more division
- No matter the decision, people will still feel unheard and dissatisfied
- Hurt feelings of separation
- Fractured relationship
- Lingering frustrations
- Overlooking voices
- More division
- Connections lost
- Lost relationships
- Tension won't go away
- Blaming both MC USA and Ohio Conference
- Hard feelings and hurt
- Less cohesiveness, splintering
- A wound that won't heal
- More division
- The conference would become too homogeneous
- Further division or splintering
- No room to respect others' differences
- I would have to change my perspective
- Don't want things to get worse
- Silo of thoughts
- People will make up their own minds. Individualism
- People unwilling to accept others
- More pain for those who disagree
- People will be hurt
- How will this affect my congregation?
- Allowing for same-sex marriage
- Going against what scripture says
- Leading to increased tribalism
- Same conversation next year
- Where do we go? With whom will we affiliate?

- We may go out of our way to compromise to our detriment.
- Issues will never end - coverings, carpet, instruments
- Messy
- Rigidity, closed-mindedness
- Legalism over grace
- Unwillingness to remodel/change
- Division
- Too inward-focused
- Lack diversity
- Weaponizing scripture
- Not as open to movings of the spirit
- Difficult positions for pastors
- Broken relationships

Ambiguity

- Not having a decisive outcome
- That there is no clear mandate
- Indecision
- Uncertainty of next steps
- No resolution
- Continually return to this issue
- Decision is not the default option
- This won't end

Loss of Resources

- Loss of resources and support
- Lose the resources of MC USA MLI database and pastoral care resources
- If we leave MC USA, Ohio Conference may not be able to sustain itself. Resources.
- Immediately cut off from resources
- Lack of financial support may lead to dissolution
- Divert resources to figuring out what to do next.
- Ohio Conference dwindles to unsustainability
- Lack of professional support for pastors and paid staff
- Person in pew doesn't realize the benefit of MC USA and Ohio Conference
- potential loss of resources. Financial. People. Information.
- Time and resources for Ohio Conference to figure it out

Loss of witness

- Witness lost because of infighting
- Continue to model divisiveness
- Reduces reach of Ohio Conference
- Are we following God's will, or will this be seen as a judgment?
- Not following biblical teachings
- Other areas get less attention
- That the politics of organizing will get in the way of our relationship with Jesus
- Conference in total disarray
- This issue will continue to take the church focus and lead to distraction from Christ's mission
- What do we say to family and friends about the decision? We are making a statement
- That we tell people they don't need to change after coming to Christ
- That we misjudge people

- Conservatives are judging the homosexual behavior and relationship
- Disconnection from world and Church issues
- Push people away from the church. The need is great for it
- How will this affect our families?
- Continue to become more polarized like the rest of the world
- To not be on the wrong side of history and have a negative impact on those who follow us
- We will divide and look to the culture around us
- Ohio Conference wandering in the wilderness

Fears specifically related to vote

- Not enough people to carry a 2/3 vote
- Potential for hung jury
- We will stay in MC USA
- Consequences will be long-lasting
- Ohio Conference becomes more isolated
- Are there spectators who may not know the whole picture here today?
- 2 to 3 years sounds terrible
- That scenario one won't happen
- With scenario 2 take your ball and go home
- With scenario 2 Ohio Conference will be pulled right, and we will regress in terms of racism, women in leadership and immigration
- New wording indicates power move
- Ohio Conference will seek affiliation with a denomination that is unwelcoming
- The unknowns of scenario
- Immediacy of withdrawing
- Vote for easy
- Unknown landing spot if Ohio Conference leaves MC USA