

April 24, 2023

Dear Ohio Conference credentialed ministers, delegates and congregations,

The Leadership Team of Ohio Conference met for our annual retreat on April 13 to fellowship with one another, pray, and to discern together God's leading of Ohio Conference over the next year. We want to let you know how we plan to move forward after Annual Conference Assembly (ACA).



Based on the feedback of delegates at the ACA, as we begin the second year of the strategic planning process with our consultant we are going to be focusing on our mission – *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*. The goal is to develop a strategic plan which includes a vision for empowering our congregations to live out *God's Greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission* in their own community and context. It will also include making adjustments to Ohio Conference structure to meet our mission and vision, both for today and into the future, as well as an updated Constitution that reflects those changes. We will be seeking input and affirmation of the strategic plan at summer credentialed minister gatherings and our early fall delegate meetings.

The reality is that as a conference of Mennonite churches across Ohio and in the surrounding states of Michigan and Pennsylvania, we are close to equally divided regarding affiliation with Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). We do not feel that that it would be a good use of Ohio Conference resources (money, time, energy, etc.) to invest in continued affiliation discernment at the present time. The review process we engaged in over the past year fulfills the mandate of the resolution passed in 2017 that required us to review our affiliation with MC USA if there was a substantive change in its Membership Guidelines.

We will continue to engage in discussion with MC USA and its leaders regarding what our future relationship will look like, both for our congregations that want to remain affiliated with MC USA and those that don't. We are committed to continuing to claim the autonomy of Ohio Conference, even as we remain an area conference of MC USA. We anticipate this to include a possible name of incorporation change from Ohio Conference of MC USA to Ohio Mennonite Conference, discussion regarding ministerial credentialing, and encouraging our congregations that want to remain a part of Ohio Conference but not directly affiliate with MC USA, to explore other networking options if they so desire.

We are confident that God has been with us during the first year of our strategic planning process, and we are looking forward to discerning together over the next year where the Holy Spirit is leading us into the future. If you have any questions, please do not to hesitate to contact anyone from the Leadership Team.

*In Christ Together,*

Ken Sims, Moderator

Paula Snyder Belousek, Assistant Moderator

Dick Barrett, Conference Minister

Jared Chase, Gifts Discernment Chair

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, Credentialing Ministry Team Representative

Andrew Blount, Stewardship Ministry Team Chair

Alysa Short, Coordinator of Volunteers

Judy King, Administrative Assistant

Tony Doehrmann, Regional Pastor – West