

Minutes of the 54th Annual Conference Assembly
Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
Central Christian School, Kidron, Ohio
March 3-4, 2023

1:30-3 p.m. — Worshipful Work Session 1

A1. **Welcome** — Moderator Ken Sims welcomed delegates to Annual Conference Assembly (ACA). He thanked delegates for preparing for ACA, praying, and fasting. He expressed thankfulness for the people who are praying for this Assembly. He invited delegates to be thinking of what we can give to the Conference, not only what we can receive from Conference.

A2. **Opening Song** — Matt Weaver, pastor of Lockport Mennonite Church in Stryker, led delegates in singing “Holy Spirit, Come with Power.”

A3. **Opening Prayer** — Assistant Moderator Paula Snyder Belousek led delegates in an opening prayer.

A4. **Introductions** — Ken Sims introduced the Ohio Conference Leadership Team and the Ohio Conference staff.

A5. **Gilead Mennonite Church** — Dick Barrett announced that Gilead Mennonite Church in Mt. Gilead closed at the end of January. The congregation held its final worship service on Jan. 29.

A6. **Introduction of Akron Swahili Mennonite Church** — Dick Barrett welcomed the Akron Swahili Mennonite Church into the Ohio Conference.

Thomas Dunn, Jacob Dodson, and the pastors of Akron Swahili Mennonite Church talked about the process of Ohio Conference congregations developing a relationship with the Akron congregation. Thomas Dunn and Jacob Dodson have been serving as mentors to the pastors from the Akron congregation.

Jacob Dodson, pastor of Wooster Mennonite Church, said that it was exciting to be here after this five-year journey. Akron Swahili Mennonite Church and a number of nearby Ohio Conference congregations have worshipped together numerous times, especially here at Central Christian School on World Communion Sunday. During the 2022 joint World Communion Sunday worship service at Central Christian, the pastors of Akron Swahili Mennonite Church, Benaya Mlondani Wahina and Malanga Lusaende, were licensed for ministry by the Ohio Conference.

Thomas Dunn, co-pastor of Crown Hill Mennonite Church in Rittman, noted that he and Jacob Dodson have been glad to act as go-betweens, facilitating the relationship between the Ohio Conference and the Akron Swahili Mennonite Church. He thanked delegates for financial donations toward the purchase of a van for the Akron Swahili congregation.

Benaya Mlondani Wahina greeted the delegates, with translation provided by Jacqueline Nashon of Tanzania, who is currently serving in Wayne County through Mennonite Central Committee’s International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP). Benaya gave praise to God and thanks to the Mennonite churches for welcoming them and doing God’s work together. He thanked Thomas Dunn, Jacob Dodson, and Dick Barrett.

A7. Prayer for Pastors — Dick Barrett noted that Glenn Nofziger has been called to serve as pastor at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church in Kidron. In addition, multiple pastors have been licensed toward ordination during the past year. Dick led a time of prayer for Glenn Nofziger, Benaya Mlondani Wahina, and Malanga Lusaende.

A8. Table Group Introductions — The delegates took time to introduce themselves to each other in their table groups, and table group leaders explained the Peaceful Practices that the table groups will be asked to follow during discussions.

A9. Introduction of Parliamentarian and Resolutions Committee — Ken Sims introduced the parliamentarian for these meetings, Matt Hochstetler. He also introduced the members of the Resolutions Committee: Jeff Hochstetler, Berlin Mennonite; Lucas Johnson, Valley View Mennonite; and Rebecca Kauffman, Bethel Mennonite.

A10. Introduction of Parliamentary Procedure — Parliamentarian Matt Hochstetler reviewed the parliamentary procedure. During these meetings, delegates will be using a modified version of Roberts Rules of Order. Resolutions are filtered through the Resolutions Committee. No amendments will be allowed for our main resolution regarding denominational affiliation. The Leadership Team can set percentages for passage of resolutions, and straw polls are allowed. Delegates were encouraged to feel free to ask Matt Hochstetler any questions on procedure.

A11. Minutes of the 2022 ACA — Delegates approved the minutes of the 2022 Annual Conference Assembly. LaVerne Yousey moved to approve the minutes, and Glenn Nofziger seconded.

A12. Mennonite Church USA Update — Rachel Ringenberg Miller, Minister of Ministerial Leadership for Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), spoke to delegates about happenings in the denomination. She is originally from Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold. She highlighted four initiatives from MC USA:

1. **Anabaptism at 500 Project** — This project is through MennoMedia. Amy Gingerich has information about the Anabaptism at 500 Project in the display area. The goal is to have 500 study groups. Each study group is assigned passages from the Bible. The groups develop marginal notes about the passages which will be included in the Anabaptist Community Bible. The Common English Bible is the translation which will be used for this project. About half of the 500 study groups have been formed so far. More information is available at anabaptismat500.com.
2. **Learn, Pray, Join** — Learn, Pray, Join is series of initiatives about various topics. This year's topic is mass incarceration.
3. **Pastoral salary guidelines** — Updates for pastoral salary guidelines will be available from MC USA in April.
4. **MennoCon23** — Registration is open for MennoCon23. The theme for this year's gathering is "Be Transformed." MennoCon23 will take place July 3-6 in Kansas City, Missouri. The gathering will be followed by the MC USA delegate assembly July 7-8. One resolution is currently planned. This resolution calls for changing denominational meetings from a biannual schedule to a triennial schedule.

A13. Mennonite Mission Network Update — Eric Frey Martin of Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) noted that MMN has had a long-term partnership with the Ohio Conference. MMN is involved with

mission within the Conference and around the world. MMN envisions all congregations being involved in mission. He noted that the churches in the Ohio Conference are generous in both financial and prayer support. Ohio Conference congregations have had members participate in MMN service programs such as Youth Venture, Service Adventure, and SOOP. More than 600 pastors in Mennonite Church USA and related denominations have participated in MMN programs. Service may be a way to raise up new leaders. He gave thanks for the Conference's support to MMN over the years, and said MMN is looking forward to continuing to partner with the Ohio Conference.

A14. Missional Story — Bill and Carole Schumacher of Sharon Mennonite Church talked to delegates about the Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Project. They showed the map of Bangladesh and noted that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worked in Bangladesh for decades. Bill served in Bangladesh with MCC for three years in the 1980s.

In recent years it has become apparent that there is a major problem with high levels of arsenic in the ground water in Bangladesh. This arsenic is naturally occurring in the environment, but the levels of arsenic in the water supply are extremely high, causing many health problems. Bill was asked to help with this problem. Bill and Carole said that this problem affects many people, and many of those affected are very poor. The World Health Organization has called the arsenic problem in Bangladesh the largest mass poisoning in human history, with about 43,000 deaths per year. The problem was first discovered in the late 1990s.

The organization SIM has had a small arsenic mitigation project for a number of years, helping people to get safe water. They have raised enough funds so that early parts of the project have begun. The Schumachers invited delegates to visit their table display at ACA to learn more about this project, and they said they would be open to coming to churches for a mission moment presentation.

A15. Conference Minister Update — Conference Minister Dick Barrett noted that there are many emotions at this meeting, and there may be some anxiety. He reminded delegates of Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." He also reminded delegates of the scripture regarding Jesus' calming of the storm. The most difficult area of discernment is God's will for our denominational affiliation. As a Conference we are committed to living into our new mission statement. We fully support the 1995 Confession of Faith.

The Conference Leadership Team is committed to the two-year review process and is committed to continuing our current initiatives. We are committed to doing life together as sisters and brothers for the glory and honor of His name. Dick invited delegates to practice Holy Indifference, and he prayed that all would set aside their own agendas, and put faith and trust in God.

A16. Introduction of Conference Visitors — Ken Sims introduced people who are here with displays from various agencies.

A17. Instructions — Paula Snyder Belousek gave instructions for the break time and the time for spiritual disciplines.

3-3:30 p.m. — Break/Displays/Snacks

3:30-4:30 p.m. — Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

4:30-6 p.m. — Group Spiritual Discernment

A18. Opening Comments for Discernment Process — Consultant Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi called the group to order. She lit a candle to remind delegates of God’s presence in this meeting space. She introduced the Strategic Planning Team: Dick Barrett, Joel Shenk, Tyson Stuckey, and Michelle Steffen. Jeanne reminded delegates that she is a part of Design Group International, and she started consulting with the Ohio Conference in April 2022.

Jeanne said that the purpose of this group spiritual discernment process is to deeply listen to each other and to show deep empathy for each other. She quoted Mennonite writer Michael King, who defined discernment as “involving the community of believers gathered in Jesus’ name around Scripture in the presence of the Holy Spirit to let God show us the way through.”

Delegates have been gathered into 19 small groups seated around tables.

Jeanne noted that discernment together and voting has not always gone well for Ohio Conference. In particular, people have mentioned the 2015 meeting at Martins Creek and the trauma involved with that meeting. Jeanne invited delegates to pay attention to what is happening in their bodies. If needed, she invited them to breathe deeply to release tension. She also invited them to step outside during ACA. In addition, she invited delegates to consider how they might be part of something different at this 2023 ACA.

A19. Song — Jeanne led delegates in “God of Grace and God of Glory” as a prayer and song.

A20. Explanation of Procedure — There should be no surprises about the affiliation resolution which delegates will vote on in the final session. The resolution will either be [Scenario 1 \(Remain Part of MC USA\)](#) or [Scenario 2 \(Withdraw from MC USA and Become Temporarily Independent\)](#). The resolution, if approved, will be a starting point for the Strategic Planning Team. From delegate feedback received at previous meetings, it appears that congregations are about evenly divided between the two options.

As part of the process of discerning which scenario the Leadership Team should present for a vote, three “traffic light” surveys will be taken. In these surveys, delegates will be asked to choose one of three options for both of the scenarios. Options are as follows:

- Green — I fully support this option.
- Yellow — This is not the option I would choose, but I would stay with Ohio Conference if this were chosen.
- Red — I cannot accept this option.

The traffic light surveys will be taken three times throughout ACA: on Friday afternoon, at 8:15 a.m. Saturday and at 10 a.m. Saturday.

Delegate responses to these surveys will help the Leadership Team determine whether to propose a resolution based on Scenario 1 or based on Scenario 2. No matter which scenario is proposed, the Leadership Team has decided that two-thirds of delegates will need to approve the resolution in order for the resolution to pass. If the proposed resolution is not affirmed by at least two-thirds of voting delegates, the Conference will remain as it currently is (as a member conference of Mennonite Church USA). However, if that is the case, there will not be a clear mandate from delegates regarding denominational affiliation.

A21. Review of The Six Hats Document — Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi reviewed the information contained in one of the resource documents that delegates had received earlier titled [“A Brief Description of Six Hats Thinking.”](#) This document explores various types of thinking that can be used in making decisions.

A22. Letter from Mennonite Church USA on March 2 — Dick Barrett told delegates that on the afternoon of March 2, the day before the start of ACA, the Leadership Team received a clarification letter from Mennonite Church USA. That letter stated that if Ohio Conference delegates approve Scenario 2 (Withdraw from Mennonite Church USA and Become Temporarily Independent), the date the vote is taken would be the effective date of the Ohio Conference’s withdrawal from Mennonite Church USA. Congregations would have one year of grace to affiliate with another MC USA conference if they wanted to remain a part of Mennonite Church USA.

A23. Review of Two Scenarios — Delegates were asked to review Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 individually. They then talked with their table groups to see if they had any questions regarding the two scenarios. Delegates were encouraged to try to answer the questions in their table groups. If they were not able to answer the questions in their groups, they were invited to ask the questions as part of an open mic session with the full delegate body.

A24. Open Mic for Clarification Questions

Darin Nissley — Why did MC USA make the change to the timeline for withdrawing from the denomination? (Scenario 2 had called for a one-year process for leaving the denomination.)

Answer — We thought we would have a process similar to the one used by Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC), which was a two-year process. However, MC USA leadership indicated that following LMC’s departure, MC USA had changed the policy about conferences leaving the denomination. If Ohio Conference did withdraw from MC USA, this change would affect people who are serving on MC USA boards. They would no longer be eligible to serve. In addition, congregations would have to ask for credentials to continue to be with MC USA.

Alvis Pettker — How does our vote affect the resolution from 2017? Will we retire that resolution?

Answer — The 2017 Ohio Conference resolution also calls for a review of denominational affiliation if MC USA makes substantive changes to the Confession of Faith. Leadership Team has heard from MC USA leaders that there is nothing in the works for changing the Confession of Faith for MC USA.

Haroldo Nunes — Regarding the Confession of Faith: What triggered this review process at this time?

Answer — The 2017 resolution calls for a review of denominational affiliation if MC USA makes a substantive change in the denomination’s membership guidelines. Since MC USA delegates voted in 2022 to retire the membership guidelines, that action triggered the review.

A25. Results of First Traffic Light Survey — Results of the first traffic light survey were shared with delegates. For Scenario 1 – about 35% chose red, while 65% chose green or yellow. For Scenario 2 – about 25% chose red, while 75% chose green or yellow. [Update: More exact results are as follows: Scenario 1 — red, 35%; yellow, 22.14%; green, 42.86%; Scenario 2 — red, 24.64%; yellow, 24.64%; green, 50.72%.]

A26. **Discussion** — Delegates were invited to write down hopes and fears regarding the two scenarios. They then discussed their hopes and fears with a partner. Finally, delegates shared their hopes and fears with the other members of their table groups. A recorder for each group wrote down what group members said, and the resulting lists were posted on a prayer wall in the meeting room. Delegates were asked to take time to read what all the delegates are thinking and to pray. Jeanne suggested that they could use their phones to take photos of the lists and then read them later.

A27. **Song** — Jeanne led delegates in singing “Come, Bring Your Burden to God.”

A28. **Announcements** — Paula shared several announcements for delegates prior to the supper break.

6-7:15 p.m. — Dinner

7:15-8:30 p.m. — Worship

Saturday, March 4

8-8:15 a.m. — Prayer Time

8:15-10:15 — Worshipful Work Session 2

A29. **Liturgy for Morning Prayer with Songs** — To start the delegate session, Dick Barrett, Tony Doehrmann, Bill Seymour and Kevin Himes led delegates in a liturgy for morning prayer including music.

A30. **Traffic Light Survey #2** — Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi gave instructions for delegates to fill out the traffic light survey regarding the two scenarios for denominational affiliation.

A31. **Grace & Groundings** — Greg Battle of Lee Heights Community Church talked to delegates about the Grace & Groundings Resource Team, which is working at anti-racism and racial reconciliation. Some objectives for the team are to learn, act and reflect on topics related to racial reconciliation. The Grace & Groundings Resource Team is looking for feedback. The team has created a list of resources which can be found on the Conference website. The 2023 Ohio Conference Winter Read focused on Bryan Stevenson’s book *Just Mercy*, and last year the Winter Read book was *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison.

The resource team is encouraging Ohio Conference congregations to observe Social Justice Sunday on June 18. Resources for Social Justice Sunday will be available in April. Other members of the Grace & Groundings team are Greg Bowman, Kevin Himes, Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells, Alysa Short, and Doug Zehr. The resource team would like delegates to submit their stories and questions, using the email address graceandgroundings@gmail.com.

A32. **Gifts Discernment** — Jared Chase, chair of the Gifts Discernment Ministry, asked for delegates to consider whether they would like to fill one of the vacancies on the Gifts Discernment slate. He introduced people on the slate and reviewed the personnel sheet for the upcoming Conference year. He encouraged people to nominate people for the slate.

A33. **Gifts Discernment Vote** — Delegates voted on the Gifts Discernment slate by paper ballot.

A34. **Financial Report and Proposed Spending Plan** — Andrew Blount, chair of the Stewardship Ministry, reviewed the proposed spending plan, noting that denominational support may change,

depending on which scenario delegates choose. The spending plan includes a cost of living raise for staff, but instead of increasing staff wages 8% all at once, the plan is to increase 4% this year and 4% next year. Overall, the proposed spending plan calls for an increase of about 2.5%.

Andrew noted that usually by this time in the fiscal year, giving is at about \$300,000, but this year giving is at about \$244,000 so far, meaning the Conference is still in a deficit position. Staff has kept expenses below the amount authorized. The Stewardship Ministry does not want to make staffing cuts, so we need to be funded more fully. Stewardship Ministry would like to get back to the level of giving which we have had in the recent past.

Andrew also reviewed information about several of the Conference's capital funds accounts. The total of all these accounts is \$705,055. He also noted that in 2022 the Ministry Development Team awarded Ministry Grants toward projects for three congregations: Zion Mennonite Church, First Mennonite Church, and Akron Swahili Mennonite Church.

A35. Table Group Discussion — Delegates discussed the proposed spending plan in their table groups.

A36. Open Mic — Delegates were invited to ask questions regarding the proposed spending plan.

Hank Unruh — Regarding staffing expenses: Does the spending plan include funding for a second regional pastor?

Answer — Yes, the estimate includes funds for a regional pastor in the east.

Dean Falb — Taking into account the 2017 resolution which allows congregations to opt out of MC USA, should the amount budgeted for giving to MC USA be amended? If we do not send a percentage of giving to MC USA from the congregations which have opted out of the denomination, that change should affect the total amount sent to MC USA. Accordingly, should line 35 be \$12,500 instead of \$15,000? That change would reduce the total of budgeted spending to \$397,513. Dean recommended that delegates amend the spending plan to reflect this change.

Answer — Stewardship Ministry considered making that change. This spending plan authorizes spending for denominational support, but actual spending will follow the formula previously mentioned, which excludes sending any portion of giving from non-MC USA congregations to the denomination. Five percent of giving from MC USA-affiliated congregations will be passed on to MC USA.

Jeff Hochstetler — Regarding Line 5: Nothing is budgeted for supporting the Ministry Inquiry Program. What if someone did want to participate in the Ministry Inquiry Program?

Answer — Leadership Team and Stewardship Team could approve the spending.

Chip Welch — If delegates vote to leave Mennonite Church USA, there will be additional administrative expenses incurred during the process of leaving the denomination. Are there funds budgeted for that possibility, and if not, where would that money come from?

Answer — Money could come from reserve funds.

A37. Spending Plan Vote — Moderator Ken Sims called for a motion to approve the 2023-24 spending plan as amended with line 35 (MC Executive Leadership Support) changed to \$12,500 and line 41 (Total Expenses) changed to \$397,513.

Vickie Yoder made a motion to approve the spending plan as amended, and Jeff Hochstetler seconded the motion.

The motion to adopt the 2023-24 spending plan as amended was approved.

A38. Vote to Accept Akron Swahili Mennonite Church as a Member Congregation — Delegates were asked to vote to accept the Akron Swahili Mennonite Church as a member congregation of the Ohio Conference. Conference Minister Dick Barrett noted that this action needed the approval of at least 75 percent of delegates in order to pass.

A motion was made to accept the Akron Swahili Mennonite Church as a member congregation of the Ohio Conference.

Haroldo Nunes made the motion, and Alex Dye seconded. Moderator Ken Sims asked delegates to stand if they approved the motion. Paula Snyder Belousek led delegates in singing “Praise God from Whom.”

The motion passed unanimously.

A39. Group Spiritual Direction — Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi told delegates that the purpose of the time together during this session was to listen deeply and to develop empathy for each other’s choices. The goal is to move toward a decision. She noted that many people are looking at the prayer wall which includes delegate responses from earlier sessions. She asked that during discussion delegates should talk about what themes have been expressed in the hopes and fears shared earlier.

She thanked delegates for the comments from yesterday’s traffic light surveys. The comments have been provided to the Leadership Team and the Resolutions Committee. If the resolution proposed does not receive support from at least 66% of delegates, Ohio Conference will remain as it is, remaining a member conference of Mennonite Church USA. However, that result would be as a default, and not a firm decision. Delegates are authorized by their congregations and entrusted to participate in discernment. The assumption is that the Holy Spirit is at work in this group.

A40. Results of Second Traffic Light Survey — One hundred forty-one ballots were received. For Scenario 1, two ballots were blank, and for Scenario 2, five ballots were blank. Percentages were as follows:

Scenario 1 – Red, 34.04%; Yellow, 18.44%; Green, 47.52%

Scenario 2 – Red, 29.20%; Yellow, 18.98%; Green, 51.82%

A slide with the results from the first traffic light survey and the results from the second traffic light survey was shown. Jeanne noted that there were some areas of movement in the results from the first to the second survey.

A41. Discussion — Jeanne gave delegates two questions to consider: 1. What value is most important to you in making this decision? 2. What is it that draws you toward the scenario of your choice?

Delegates were asked to consider these questions individually at first, and then they shared their thoughts with a partner before sharing them in their table groups.

A42. Open Mic Session —

Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi asked delegates to be comfortable with silence during this time. She asked that delegates going to the microphone to speak would not repeat what others have already said. What is said now is for the benefit of the body; accordingly, she asked that delegates would not say things in response to others. She reminded delegates that God is here, Jesus is in us, and the Spirit shapes our lives.

Jeanne asked that three people who are drawn to Scenario 1 and three people who are drawn to Scenario 2 would speak during this open mic session.

Chip Welch — Scenario 1 — He noted that there are uncertainties with Scenario 2 regarding funding. He encouraged openness to people that are different than us, and noted that people in our congregations are not all the same. Church should be a place for people from all walks of life. No matter what our decision is, the tension which exists still needs to be addressed.

Vickie Yoder — Scenario 2 — She is drawn to Scenario 2 because she feels it follows scripture. God gives us discipline and guidance. Our individual walk with the Lord is between us and God. She wants to follow the Lord and feel that she has served God well.

Hardaye Ramjit — When she joined the Mennonite Church, she was drawn to the values of the church. Her walk from Hinduism to Jesus Christ has been shaped by love. We all are brothers and sisters. We need to love God first, and love our neighbors. She is still working on choosing a scenario.

Bill Seymour — Scenario 1 — A few minutes ago, we joyfully accepted a new congregation of people who we may not fully understand and are of a different culture. He understands scripture better when he sits with others with whom he does not agree on everything. We are better with a variety of thoughts. Scenario 2 seems to be the opposite of that idea.

Haroldo Nunes — Scenario 1 — The people who sent him to represent them agree with this decision. He reflected on how he was accepted into the church as someone who was different. Personally, he has more conservative thinking, but his children have the opposite point of view. Are we open to everyone? How many youth do we see in our churches?

Matthew Peterson — Scenario 2 — He wants to keep the New Testament in front of us. Human sexuality may not be the biggest issue that we are confronting. There are other issues as well — wealth, Christian nationalism, racism, immigration. Scripture continues to confront us and asks us to change. He wants us to be conformed to Jesus' way of teaching. He does not want to drop Anabaptist distinctives.

Lucas Johnson — Scenario 2 — He does not feel any genuine connection to MC USA. In his limited experience with the denomination, MC USA seems more like a political organization to him.

Jeanne asked recorders from each table group to post the table discussion notes on the wall when this session is finished.

A43. Third Traffic Light Survey — Delegates completed the traffic light survey once again.

A44. Gifts Discernment Ballot Results Announced — The results of the Gifts Discernment ballot were announced. **The Gifts Discernment slate was approved by 99.3% of delegates.**

A45. **Announcements** — Ken Sims and Paula Snyder Belousek shared several announcements. The offering collected during the Friday evening worship service totaled \$2,292. Thirty-five of 41 congregations are represented at ACA this year. There are 190 attendees, including 153 delegates.

10:15-10:30 a.m. — Break/Displays/Snacks

10:30-11:30 a.m. — Worship

11:45 a.m.-1 p.m. — Lunch

1-2 p.m. — Group Spiritual Discernment

A46. **Traffic Light Survey Results** — As delegates returned to the meeting area, the results of all three traffic light surveys were displayed. The results of the third survey were as follows:

Scenario 1 – Red, 36.49%; Yellow, 14.19%; Green, 49.32%

Scenario 2 – Red, 25%; Yellow, 22.22%; Green, 52.78%

A47. **Answer to Delegate Question** — Moderator Ken Sims noted that there had been a delegate question that he would like to address. Regarding health insurance coverage for pastors through the Corinthian Plan, he noted that pastors will continue to be able to have insurance coverage, no matter whether delegates choose to stay with MC USA or not.

A48. **Affiliation Resolution Presented** — Ken Sims read the resolution being brought to the delegates for approval. The approval of two-thirds of delegates is needed to pass this resolution.

Following is the wording of the resolution:

**Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA
ACA Resolution
March 4, 2023**

RESOLVED, that Ohio Conference withdraws from Mennonite Church USA;

RESOLVED, that Ohio Conference will amend its Constitution (which must be approved by the delegates) at the 2024 Annual Conference Assembly to formalize its separation from Mennonite Church USA;

RESOLVED, that Ohio Conference will within a reasonable time amend its Articles of Incorporation (including changing its name to Ohio Mennonite Conference) and other governing documents (neither the Articles of Incorporation nor other governing documents require the delegates' approval) to formalize its separation from Mennonite Church USA;

RESOLVED, that Ohio Conference will remain unaffiliated with any other conference, denomination, network, or other group for not more than 3 years; and

RESOLVED, that during its period of unaffiliation, Ohio Conference will seek affiliation with a new conference, denomination, network, or other group.

Assistant Moderator Paula Snyder Belousek explained the process that would be used for dealing with this proposed resolution. A motion to adopt the resolution is needed. Then there will be time for open mic, followed by work with the consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi. Finally, there will be a paper ballot vote.

Bob Fitzwater made a motion to adopt the resolution, and Matthew Williams seconded.

A49. Open Mic Time for Questions of Clarification

Sam Beiler — If we don't have an affiliation within three years, what happens?

Answer — We won't let three years go by without an answer to the affiliation question.

Keith Lyndaker Schlabach — How did the resolution come about? Based on the surveys, neither scenario seems to have 66 percent affirmation.

Answer — There was some movement in delegate responses from the second survey to the third survey. The Leadership Team believes Scenario 2 has the better chance to find approval.

Keith Lyndaker Schlabach — If the resolution does not pass, then what?

Answer — We would default to where we are currently.

Paula Snyder Belousek noted that Leadership Team is offering the resolution in a posture of humbleness, based on the feedback received from delegates. They are not sure if it will get the majority. They did not want to offer no resolution at all. They are inviting delegates to continue walking with us.

Hank Unruh — Is there a plan for how we find another affiliation?

Answer — That process is still to be determined. We would want to find a partner that honors the same values that we do.

Dan King — What does the default mode mean? Will we revisit this decision?

Answer — We don't know if we would revisit this decision. It is in the hands of the delegates.

Haroldo Nunes — Will we have time to talk with our groups before voting?

Answer — Yes, definitely. Jeanne will be leading a time of conversation.

Brittany Spotts — What is the job of the Strategic Planning Committee if we remain in the default scenario?

Answer — We are not sure at this point. The Leadership Team and consultant would need to consider both structure and affiliation as we move forward.

Jen Hartzler — Could we go back to MC USA if we didn't find another group to affiliate with?

Answer — That question would be up to delegate body to decide.

Alex Dye – How is voting against Scenario 2 different than voting yes for Scenario 1?

Answer — We would like to have a clear mandate together. Voting for Scenario 2 would give a clear mandate.

Darin Nissley — How do non-votes count?

Answer — The resolution needs to be approved by at least two-thirds of the votes cast. Non-votes would not be counted in the totals.

Mary Spearman — Why is only one resolution being presented?

Answer — This has been the goal all along. We wanted to be able to present one resolution.

A50. Preparation for Discernment and Discussion — Jeanne reminded delegates that God is with us, Jesus is within us, and the Spirit shapes our lives. She led delegates in singing “Spirit of the Living God.”

Jeanne gave instructions for the discernment time. She asked delegates to spend 15 minutes of time in individual prayer until 1:45 p.m. and encouraged them to go outside during this time. She instructed them to then spend time talking to others after they spent time in prayer. At 2 p.m. the vote will be taken, and then delegates will take a break, returning at 2:30 p.m. for the closing session.

Clarification Question — What happens when we have a ballot that has neither vote?

Answer — That ballot does not count toward the percentages.

A51. Prayer — Dick Barrett led the delegates in prayer.

A52. Affiliation Vote — Delegates voted on the affiliation resolution by paper ballot.

2:30-4 p.m. — Worship Work Session 3

A53. Opening Song — Matt Weaver led delegates in singing “Heart with Loving Heart United.”

A54. Prayer — Paula Snyder Belousek led delegates in prayer.

A55. Resolutions of Thanks — Moderator Ken Sims shared two resolutions of thanks proposed by the Resolutions Committee:

We thank Ohio Conference Staff, leadership, and Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi for their work and support of Ohio Conference churches and pastors this past year. We appreciate their energy, clarity, and determination to help us live into our new Conference vision and mission statement.

Greg Battle made a motion to adopt the resolution, and Darrin Snyder Belousek seconded. **Resolution approved.**

We would like to acknowledge and express our immense gratitude for Sherah-Leigh Gerber’s faithful service as Regional Pastor within Ohio Conference. Her leadership, wisdom, and support were invaluable to our conference, our congregations, and our pastors. We are better because of her service.

Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler made a motion to adopt the resolution, and Thomas Dunn seconded. **Resolution approved. Delegates also responded with a standing ovation honoring Sherah-Leigh Gerber.**

A56. **Delegate Incentive Drawing** — There was a drawing for gift baskets for delegates who turned in the delegate checklist. Kim Liechty, Brittany Spotts, Rebecca Hager and Jeff Hochstetler won the gift baskets.

A57. **Missional Resource Team Update** — Alex Dye, a member of the Missional Resource Team, gave an update on the group's work. He noted that in the past few years, missional conferences have been on a theoretical level and have taken place immediately prior to ACA. This year Ohio Conference is moving to a more hands-on experience for the missional workshop. The missional workshop is being moved to a Saturday, April 15. The theme for this workshop is "Outward Church." The workshop is inspired by the book of Acts and the story of Lydia. The workshop will encourage outside-the-box thinking, and developing missional outposts for your own community. The day will include stories from missional practitioners from across the country. Participants will get real-time feedback from others. Mauricio Chenlo will be the facilitator. Ohio Conference is encouraging teams from congregations to participate.

A58. **Pastor-Spouse Retreat** — Valerie Jones from South Union and Doug King from Tedrow Mennonite invited pastors to participate in the upcoming Pastor-Spouse Retreat in November. The planners of this retreat are looking for groups to be sponsors for this event. Valerie and Doug encouraged congregations to donate toward this retreat.

A59. **Group Spiritual Discernment** — Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi led the delegates in a group discernment time. She asked delegates to consider the following question: Assume that the vote went the opposite way from what you wanted. What do you hope for Ohio Conference? Delegates were invited to write down their responses to this question. They then spent time talking with a partner about their answers, followed by discussion in their table groups.

A60. **Resolution Results Announced** — Ken Sims announced the results of the vote on the resolution. Prior to the announcement, delegates were asked to sit in silence for two minutes after the vote was announced. The results were as follows:

81 votes – Yes, I am in favor of this resolution. – 54.7%

67 votes – No, I am opposed to this resolution. – 45.3%

3 abstentions

Because the resolution did not receive affirmation from at least two thirds of the delegates, it was not adopted.

A61. **Time of Silence** — Delegates sat in silent reflection for two minutes after the results were announced.

A62. **Statement from Moderator** — Moderator Ken Sims said that each of us has had different thoughts about these issues, but Leadership Team is resolved to stay together as a Conference. He encouraged delegates to continue to walk together. We still have more work to do together.

A63. **Time of Group Discussion** — Jeanne asked recorders for the table groups to read back what had been said previously. She then asked delegates to reflect on this question: Where do we go from here? The delegates talked to a partner about their answers, then they talked in their table groups, reflecting on this question: What's next?

A64. **Words of Thanks** — Dick gave thanks for the work of Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi. Delegates gave Jeanne a standing ovation. Dick also expressed thanks for this group of people. He feels blessed to serve this group. We continue to have work to do. Hopefully we can do that work together.

A65. **Communion** — Delegates shared in a time of communion led by Dick Barrett, Tony Doehrmann, Hardaye Ramjit, and Sue Short.

A66. **Announcements** — Assistant Moderator Paula Snyder Belousek shared several final announcements.

A67. **Closing Prayer** — Dick Barrett shared a closing prayer.