# Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA 55th Annual Conference Assembly

Philippians 2.5-11

# Following Jesus Together with a Common Mission

with input by Meghan Good

# March 1-2, 2024

Sharon Mennonite Church Plain City, Ohio

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### ANNUAL CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY SCHEDULE Sharon Mennonite, Plain City, Ohio March 1-2, 2024

# Friday, March 1

	9:00-10:00	Registration
	10:00-11:00	Worshipful Work Session #1
	11:15-12:30	Worshipful Work Session #2
	12:30-1:45	Lunch
	1:45-3:15	Plenary with Meghan Good
	3:15-3:45	Break/Displays/Snacks
	3:45-5:15	Plenary with Meghan
	5:30-7:00	Dinner with Pastor Appreciation Meal
	7:15-8:15	Worship with Meghan
Satur	day, March 2	
	8:00-8:15	Prayer time
	8:15-9:30	Plenary with Meghan

- 9:30-10:00 Break/Displays/Snacks
- 10:15-11:15 Worship with Meghan
- 11:30-12:45 Lunch
- 12:45-2:15 Worshipful Work Session #3
- 2:15-2:30 Break
- 2:30-4:00 Engagement and Action
- 4:00-4:30 Worship with Communion

# Gather, Equip and Send

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# Love God, Love others and make disciples of Jesus Christ

# A. Mission of the Church

We believe that Jesus Christ is at the center of who we are and all we do.

The mission of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA is to Gather, Equip and Send our congregations by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out God's Greatest Commandments<sup>1</sup> and Jesus' Great Commission<sup>2</sup>

In order to fulfill our mission, the focus of Ohio Conference is to support, connect and lead in ways that equip and empower our congregations to enlarge the faith community in obedience to Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 12:29-31 <sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

### Ohio Conference Personnel that served in 2023-2024 (See registration packet for 2024-2025 personnel list)

Position	Name	Congregation	Vocation	Years served
	Name	congregation	Vocation	
Leadership Team				
Moderator	Ken Sims	Sharon Mennonite	Everence financial services	2
Assistant Moderator		Salem Mennonite, Elida	pastor	5
Credentialing Min. Rep.		abach Millersburg Mennonite	pastor	1
Gifts Discern. Ministry Chair	Matt Weaver	Lockport Mennonite	pastor	1
Stewardship Ministry Chair	Andrew Blount	Bethel Mennonite	non-profit administrator	3
Conference Minister	Dick Barrett	Oak Grove, West Liberty	conference minister (served through Oc	-
Interim Conference Minister			interim conference minister (began 12/	1/2023)
Coordinator of Volunteers (ex-officio member) Alysa Short Peace		coordinator of volunteers		
Secretary (ex-officio member	) Judy King	Orrville Mennonite	administrative secretary	
Ministry Development Team	I			
Worship Focus Leader	Vacancy			
Faith Focus Leader	Valerie Jones	South Union Mennonite	retired hospital administrator	2
Witness Focus Leader	Joel Shenk	Toledo Mennonite	pastor	5
Member (Prayer Coordinator	) Vacancy			
Member	Alan Kauffman	Oak Grove, West Liberty	farm consultant	1
Member	Vacancy			
Member	Vacancy			
Member	Vacancy			
Credentialing Ministry				
Chairperson	Doug King	Tedrow Mennonite	pastor	5
Member	Dan Hooley	Crown Hill Mennonite	pastor	1
Member	Rebecca Kauffman	Bethel Mennonite	pastor	1
Member	Rachelle Lyndaker Schla	abach Millersburg Mennonite	pastor	1
Member	LaVerne Yousey	Summit Mennonite	retired professor	6
Stewardship Ministry				
Chairperson	Andrew Blount	Bethel Mennonite	non-profit admin.	3
Member (finance focus)	Carolyn Kopec	Sharon Mennonite	banking associate	1
Member (finance focus)	Steve Schmid	Wooster Mennonite	Retired SmithFoods president	2
Member (stewardship focus)	vacancy			
Member (stewardship focus)	vacancy			
Member (endowment focus)	Bruce Breckbill	Salem, Kidron	Everence	4
Member (endowment focus)	Chelsea Waidelich	West Clinton Mennonite	accountant	6
Gifts Discernment Ministry				
Chairperson	Matt Weaver	Lockport Mennonite	pastor	2
Member	Marion Beyeler	Orrville Mennonite	retired volunteer	1
Member	Sher Byler	First Mennonite	counselor	2
Member	Erin Dye	Oak Grove, West Liberty	social worker/therapist	3
Member	Lucas Johnson	Valley View Mennonite	pastor	2
Member	Ken Neuenschwander	Sonnenberg	retired	2
Member	Hardaye Ramjit	Lee Heights	pastor	5
Member	Erin Unruh	Salem, Kidron	pharmacy tech	1
Member	Vacancy			
Salary & Benefits Committee	2			
Chairperson	Andrew Blount	Bethel Mennonite	non-profit administrator	3
Member	Christine Yoder	Oak Grove, West Liberty	staff accountant	2
Member	Ruth Kauffman	Tedrow Mennonite	credit analyst	3

### OHIO CONFERENCE DELEGATES to ANNUAL CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY March 1-2, 2024

### **Ohio Conference Staff**

Interim Conference Minister Interim Regional Pastor (east) Regional Pastor (west) Conference Editor Finance Coordinator Coordinator of Volunteers Administrative Assistant	Dan Miller Larry Rohrer Tony Doehrmann Ann Leaman Stanley Helmuth Alysa Short Judy King	Walnu Berlin West ( Beech Beech Peace Orrville	Clinton	574-238-1883 574-312-4326 419-551-1107 330-453-0150 330-857-5421 419-572-1348 330-857-5421	.50 FTE .50 FTE .50 FTE (contracted) .25 FTE
P - Pastoral Staff LL - Lay Leader D - Congregational Delegate YAD - Young Adult Delegate C - Conference Ministry or Com S - Ohio Conference Staff	nmittee Member				
AGORA CHRISTIAN FELLOW Columbus, OH	SHIP	P P		artholomew Bartholomew	
BEECH MENNONITE CHURCI Louisville, OH	Η	P S D S D D	Stanle Jen Ha Ann Le Bryan		
BERLIN MENNONITE CHURC Berlin, OH	н	P D S D	Janice Larry F	ochstetler Hershberger Rohrer n Rohrer	
BETHEL MENNONITE CHURC West Liberty, OH	СН	P C D D	Andre Byron	ca Kauffman (Credo w Blount (Stewards Kauffman Newcomer	
CENTRAL MENNONITE CHUF Archbold, OH	RCH	D D D D		Nafziger Riegsecker	
CROWN HILL MENNONITE C Rittman, OH	HURCH	P P D D	Dan H Eldina	as Dunn ooley (Credentialing Nussbaum Ramseyer	ı Ministry)
FAIRPOINT MENNONITE CHU Fairpoint OH	JRCH	Ρ	Darrel	McVay	
FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH	5	Ρ	Rosali	nd Young	

Canton, OH	YAD C D D D	Elliot Bowen Sher Byler (Gifts Discernment Ministry) Maynard Hershberger Darin Nissley Ramona Nissley
FRIENDSHIP MENNONITE CHURCH Bedford Heights, OH	P D D	Alvis Pettker Sheri Banks Katherine Harris
GOOD SHEPHERD MENNONITE CHURCH Archbold, OH	P D D	Valentine Iroha Sara Mendez Ben Tijerina
HUBER MENNONITE CHURCH New Carlisle, OH	D	Kevin Smith
INLET MENNONITE CHURCH Archbold, OH		
LEE HEIGHTS COMMUNITY CHURCH Cleveland, OH	P D D D C D	Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells Al Anthony Nathan Beachy Virgil Bufford Kathy Grieser Hardaye Ramjit (Gifts Discernment Ministry) Mary Spearman
LOCKPORT MENNONITE CHURCH Stryker, OH	P D D D	Matt Weaver (Gifts Discernment/LT) Gary Stuckey Galen Nofziger Donna Smith Jeff Wyse
MAPLE GROVE MENNONITE CHURCH Hartville, OH	P D D D D	Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler Lois Bontrager Paul Bontrager Larry Hills Ruth Hills
MAPLE GROVE MENNONITE CHURCH New Castle, PA	Ρ	Cheryl Vanatsky
MARTINS MENNONITE CHURCH Orrville, OH	P D D	Ernie Hershberger Dean Falb Amy Murray
MIDWAY MENNONITE CHURCH Columbiana, OH	P D D D	Matthew Peterson John Hostetler Harold Trotter Marian Wenger
MILLERSBURG MENNONITE CHURCH Millersburg, OH	P D D D	Keith Lyndaker Schlabach Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach (Cred. Min) Rhoda Mast Zach Miller Conrad Yoder

OAK GROVE MENNONITE CHURCH Smithville, OH

### OAK GROVE MENNONITE CHURCH West Liberty, OH

### **ORRVILLE MENNONITE CHURCH** Orrville, OH

PRIMERA IGLESIA MENONITA Helena, OH

SALEM MENNONITE CHURCH Elida, OH

SALEM MENNONITE CHURCH Kidron, OH

SALEM MENNONITE CHURCH Waldron, MI

SALEM MENNONITE CHURCH Wooster, OH

SHARON MENNONITE CHURCH Plain City, OH

SONNENBERG MENNONITE CHURCH Kidron, OH

- Ρ Doug Zehr
- Ρ Miriam Zehr
- D Jenifer Hartzler
- D Herb Hershberger
- Harold Hochstetler D
- D Paul Miller D
- Art Neuenschwander
- Ρ Alex Dye
- С Erin Dye (Gifts Discernment Ministry)
- YAD Becca Hager
- С Alan Kauffman (Ministry Development Team)
- D Kim Leichty
- Winfred Stoltzfus D
- D Esther Witmer
- Ρ **Bill Seymour**
- С Marion Beyeler (Gifts Discernment Ministry)
- D Dan Jantzi
- D Danae King
- S Judy King
- LL Tony Ortiz, Jr.
- Р Paula Snyder Belousek (Leadership Team/MDT)
- D Darrin Snyder Belousek
- Chip Welch D
- Ρ **Kevin Himes**
- Ρ Hank Unruh
- С Bruce Breckbill (Stewardship Ministry)
- D **Bob Fitzwater**
- D Krista Wenger Lehman С
  - Erin Unruh (Gifts Discernment Ministry)
- Ρ **Dorothy Ritchey-Moore**
- D John Cargill
- Ρ **David Hargrave**
- D Glenn Burkholder
- D Kelly Lawlis
- Ρ Walter Campbell
- Carolyn Kopec (Stewardship Ministry) С
- Steve Kopec D
- D Carole Schumacher
- С Ken Sims (Leadership Team)
- Р Mark Whitmer
- Ρ **Glenn Nofziger**
- D Michael Amstutz
- D Robert Eshleman
- С Ken Neuenschwander (Gifts Discernment Ministry)
- D Lisa Zuercher

Р SOUTH UNION MENNONITE CHURCH Matthew Williams West Liberty, OH D Gary Jones С Valerie Jones (Ministry Development Team) D Sally Louden SUMMIT MENNONITE CHURCH С LaVerne Yousey (Credentialing Ministry) Barberton, OH D Bob Oyer Ρ SUNNYSIDE MENNONITE CHURCH **Russ Richardson** Conneaut Lake, PA **TEDROW MENNONITE CHURCH** Ρ Doug King (Credentialing Ministry Team) Wauseon, OH D Lynn Miller Tami Miller D D Dan Sauder Р **TOLEDO MENNONITE CHURCH** Joel Shenk (Ministry Development Team) Toledo, OH D Charlie Cook Laura Hoag D Р TRENTON MENNONITE CHURCH Ron Wenzel D Randy Becker Trenton, OH Jason Pauley D D Tina Wilson Р VALLEY VIEW MENNONITE CHURCH Lucas Johnson (Gifts Discernment Ministry) D Spartansburg, PA Robert Esh D Marlene Hershberger Terry Hershberger D YAD Dylan Wanker WAYSIDE MENNONITE CHAPEL Ρ John Kelly Pedro, OH WOOSTER MENNONITE CHURCH Р Jacob Dodson Wooster, OH D Jim Hartman D Kim Hartman С Steve Schmid (Stewardship Ministry)) Р ZION MENNONITE CHURCH Sue Short Archbold, OH Ρ John David Thacker D Greg Nofziger

D Barb Yoder

### **Retired Ohio Conference Pastors**

(Our retired pastors are invited guests to Annual Conference Assembly, but may also be voting delegates if so appointed by their home congregations.)

ISRAEL AGUILAR, 412 S Fayette St, PO Box 356, Fayette OH 43521 DICK BARRETT, 500 Pickrelltown Rd, West Liberty OH 43357 HENRY BEUN, 5626 Kidron Rd, Apple Creek OH 44606 ROB BURDETTE, 17823 Carson Rd, Butler OH 44822 PAUL CONRAD, 7800 Dayton-Springfield Rd Apt C7, Fairborn OH 45324 GEORGE DUNN, 14299 Road 5N, Pandora OH 45877 DARRELL EDIGER, 225 Wenger Rd N, Dalton OH 44618 ROBB ESH, 45565 Erie Co. Line Rd, Corry PA 16407 CHARLES GAUTSCHE, 820 Ringenberg Dr, Archbold OH 43502 STEVE HEATWOLE, 25925 County Road E, Archbold OH 43502 RANDY KEELER, 503 Greding St, Bluffton OH 45817 MIKE KELLY, 429 Parkview Ave, Bryan OH 43506 DAN KING, 2216 N Walnut St, Dover OH 44622 ELDON KING, 333 E. Sassafras, Orrville 44667 JOHN MILLER, 15297 Arnold Rd, Dalton OH 44618 ROBIN MILLER, 3533 Hildana Rd, Shaker Heights OH 44120 RANDY NAFZIGER, 5175 County Road 19, Wauseon OH 43567 ALLAN PATTERSON, 2105 Huron Dr, London OH 43140 RALPH REINFORD, 15241 Arnold Rd, Dalton OH 44618 MARILYN ROSSITER, 3111 Alpine Dr, Dalton OH 44618 REID SHORT, 408 High St, Archbold OH 43502 ANDREW STONER, 1641 New Castle Ln, Springfield OH 45503 RAUL TADEO, 430 OrrVilla Dr, #802, Orrville OH 44667 DAVID TIJERINA, 914 Monterey Ct, Archbold OH 43502 GUILLERMO TIJERINA, 613 N Defiance, Archbold OH 43502 DALE WYSE, 831 Ringenberg Dr, Archbold OH 43502 BOB YODER, 1027 Willow Creek Dr, Plain City OH 43064

# A Note to Delegates

We welcome you as a delegate to the Annual Conference Assembly of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA. If you have served as a delegate before, you are familiar with the responsibilities and expectations of your assignment. If this is your first turn as a delegate, your responsibilities are outlined in the Conference Constitution as listed below:

# Article VI. Section C. Role of Conference Delegates

Conference delegates shall:

- Represent their congregation to the Conference.
- Communicate Conference work and ministry to the congregation.
- Invite the congregation to financially support the ministry of the Conference.
- Read the newsletters and Web sites to keep informed of the latest Conference happenings.
- Attend area cluster group meetings where much of the information sharing, discussion and discernment will take place.
- Attend Annual Conference Assembly to be filled with the Spirit in the areas of Worship, Faith, and Witness and to help in the discernment process with other congregational delegates that are in attendance.
- Find ways to apply worship, faith, and witness in one's own congregation and mission cells.

In order to prepare for and participate in floor discussion of the various business items, we urge you to carefully read the enclosed reports **prior** to Annual Conference Assembly. Mark down any notes or questions you may have and feel free to seek the counsel of others in your congregations regarding these items. This will allow you to reflect both your viewpoint and that of your congregations as well.

Most of the reporting session time will be spent in floor discussion about the activities, affirmations and concerns listed in the reports, rather than in report presentation. This approach has been affirmed in previous assemblies. Preparation on your part prior to the Assembly will help assure wise use of this time.

After the Assembly concludes, you should be prepared to share with your congregation the inspiration of the sessions, as well as any actions approved by the delegates. This will help to encourage full congregational ownership and participation in the Conference program for the upcoming year.

May God bless you as you serve both Conference and your congregation in this way.

# Bringing Resolutions to the Annual Conference Assembly

Adopted by Conference Council, November 11, 2005

Resolutions may be proposed to delegates of the Annual Conference Assembly (ACA) of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA (Ohio Conference) for discussion and action after prior review and recommendation of the Leadership Team or the Resolutions Committee at ACA.

The Resolutions Committee, composed of three members, will be appointed by the Gifts Discernment Ministry.

**Criteria**: No proposed resolution shall conflict or be in disagreement with the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) of Mennonite Church USA.

The following is adapted from the Workbook *Can't Keep Quiet!* Charlotte 2005 Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly (pp 25-26). "Developing Resolutions for the Mennonite Church USA."

### **Purpose of resolutions**

Resolutions are tools of Ohio Conference intended to:

- Educate Resolutions can provide information about issues facing Ohio Conference and can help our congregations and members better understand viewpoints and experiences beyond their current awareness.
- **Build consensus -** While it is not necessary for us to arrive at unanimous approval in order to pass a resolution, careful work toward common understandings and language can build unity in the conference. Resolutions will not be considered binding on members and congregations of Ohio Conference unless they are identified as having that intent from the beginning of the process.
- **Provide an Ohio Conference understanding, while acknowledging dissenting voices -**Resolutions offer church members as well as those beyond our conference a better understanding of our positions. When we are not united in our viewpoints, resolutions can both name our areas of agreement and areas of differing views, in hopes of fostering better understanding and ongoing discernment.
- **Provide a foundation for member advocacy to government** Rather than viewing the primary purpose of resolutions as statements Ohio Conference sends to the government on our behalf, resolutions can be more effective as resources for individuals and congregations as they address legislative bodies.
- Communicate a Conference position of public policy directly to appropriate government officials - With a resolution written for such a purpose and passed by at least two-thirds of voting delegates a letter, signed by the Conference Minister and Moderator, with the resolution shall be sent to the appropriate government official(s).

# Preferred process for developing resolutions.

In order to best accomplish the purposes described above, we are committed to:

- **Begin with a careful study process involving congregations** Major issues will be processed best if study documents are developed and distributed *before* resolutions are crafted.
- Create a safe space for all voices to be heard Honest discernment will not shut off differing viewpoints.
- Seek to understand the stories behind our differing viewpoints Rather than arguing positions, we will search for common ground through hearing how we have come to our various perspectives.
- **Involve significant delegate discussion in small groups -** We will commit adequate time for hearing each other's viewpoints and giving feedback to the whole delegate body.
- Allow for segmented consideration If delegates agree on most parts of a resolution, but not on a particular part, the Leadership Team will have the option of testing delegate response on a section-by-section basis.
- Set a high threshold for adoption The more important we consider a decision to be, the higher our level of agreement should be. If a simple majority vote does not seem appropriate, the Leadership Team will suggest a percentage needed to adopt a particular resolution.

# An Alternate Process for Developing Resolutions to Respond to Issues at Hand.

When it is important to respond to a situation of more immediacy, some aspects of this preferred approach might not be appropriate. In these times, the Resolutions Committee may present resolutions for delegate discernment without going through the Congregational study process. However, if it is determined that delegates are significantly divided by an issue, it may still be preferred to delay adopting a resolution until more study and discernment are possible.

# The role of the resolutions committee

At each Annual Conference Assembly, a Resolutions Committee appointed by the Gifts Discernment Ministry has the role and authority to receive and edit ideas for resolutions.

The Resolutions Committee, after consultation as needed with framers of the original resolution, will discern which resolutions should be developed for future consideration and which resolutions should be dealt with during the

current delegate assembly. Resolutions deferred by the Resolutions Committee will be reviewed by the Leadership Team for any further action.

So that the Committee has time to work, proposed resolutions must be submitted no later than three weeks prior to ACA (Feb. 9, 2024). There are two types of exceptions:

- 1) The Ohio Conference Leadership Team can waive any portion of this rule, by unanimous consent, if deemed necessary for timeliness and expediency.
- Resolutions expressing acknowledgments, thanks and appreciation can be drafted by the Resolutions Committee at any time during Annual Conference Assembly or they can be proposed from the floor by any delegate.

## Suggested format for resolutions.

We recommend that resolutions be crafted with the following theological framework:

- **Faith** what we believe in and affirm.
- **Hope** our vision of God's intention for members, congregations and conference.
- **Love** what compassion, justice, and righteousness require of us.

This framework may not serve the purposes of all resolutions, but where possible, the use of this framework can help keep the focus of God's work in our midst.

### Minutes of the 54<sup>th</sup> 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:

- 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 <u>Scenario 1 (Remain Part of MC USA) or Scenario 2</u> (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 <u>"A Brief Description of Six Hats Thinking."</u> 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 <u>graceandgroundings@gmail.com</u>.

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 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.

Recorded by Ann Leaman

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA May 2, 2023 Ministry Development Team Meeting #1 Zoom meeting

**Present:** Dick Barrett, Paula Snyder Belousek (chairperson), Andrew Blount, Tony Doehrmann, Alan Kauffman, Judy King, Ann Leaman, Alysa Short, Joel Shenk

Absent: David Elkins, Valerie Jones, Marilyn Rossiter

- M1. Welcome and opening devotions. Paula welcomed everyone to the meeting. She led the devotional time through visio divina sharing a painting by Carol Aust, titled Sojourners. After a time of sharing, Paula led in prayer.
- M2. **Review of the Ministry Development Team (MDT) purpose and structure.** Paula reviewed the purpose and core values of MDT as outlined in the Policy and Operations Guidelines. "The Ministry Development Team is the lead group responsible for implementing the purpose of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA '...to cultivate healthy congregations through the equipping of leaders in the areas of worship, faith and witness." Paula noted that this purpose statement was based on the old mission statement and will likely be changing as we go through the strategic planning process.
- M3. Minutes. The minutes from the Jan 5, 2023, meeting were approved as presented. M/S/P
- M4. Conference Minister Report. Dick shared the following:
  - He is now serving as regional pastor in the east. One pastor peer group meets in person, and one meets via Zoom. A highlight of this role has been overseeing several ordination services, with another ordination happening soon.
  - He reported that First Mennonite will be in transition soon as Sean Swanson wraps up his time there and moves to Indiana.
  - He attended Constituency Leadership Council along with Paula.
  - He and Tony have been fielding many questions regarding affiliation.
  - The Leadership Team met with our consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, after ACA, and Dick has met with her as well. She has produced a timeline for our work in the coming year. After looking at vision, strategic planning will focus on structure and the constitution. Input is desired from both Leadership

Team and MDT before bringing proposals to delegates at the fall cluster meetings (which we hope to schedule in September once again). A joint meeting with Leadership Team and MDT was scheduled for June 15, 2023, from 9-11 a.m. via Zoom. A face-to-face meeting after the fall delegate meetings was tentatively scheduled for Oct. 12, 2023. Dick will send out the timeline. Thanks were expressed to Dick for all the extra work he is doing. Leadership Team has decided that it is best to wait to hire a second regional pastor until we know what our congregations decide in the coming year.

- M5. **Regional Pastor Report.** Tony shared that he has been working with three pastoral search committees, and the work for all three will soon be coming to a close.
- M6. **Coordinator of Volunteers Report**. Prior to the meeting, Alysa sent a list of recent events and upcoming events for review. She highlighted the following:
  - The second Ohio Conference Winter Read was not as highly attended as last winter, but it was
    encouraging to see persons participating that were different than the usual persons attending
    Conference activities. We need to decide if we want to continue to offer this activity.
  - The Missional Workshop had to be canceled due to low registration numbers. There is no good answer as to why registrations were so low, and there is no good way to find out.
  - Some videos were made that were to be used during the missional workshop. We need to discuss ways to make use of these videos.
  - An Enneagram workshop is being planned for fall. We would like to make it available for persons beyond just pastors this time. It is in the initial planning stages, but we hope to offer it in the east and the west.
  - A Pastor/Spouse Retreat will be held Nov. 10-12, 2023, at Deer Creek State Park Lodge. Although we have secured other underwriters for this event, MDT continues to be a heavy backer of this event in order to make the cost of the weekend more affordable for our pastors. The planners are requesting up to \$3,000 to help underwrite the costs of this weekend event.

# Action. A motion was made to approve up to \$3,000 from the MDT line item to help underwrite the costs of the fall 2023 Pastor/Spouse Retreat. M/S/P

- The Grace & Groundings Resource Team continues to publish articles in every other issue of *Ohio Mennonite Evangel*. They have also published resources this spring for congregations to use on Social Justice Sunday, which is June 18, 2023.
- Youth Worker findings. As directed by MDT, Alysa did some work contacting other area conferences and found that other area conferences also struggle in resourcing youth workers. From the contacts she made, some resources were suggested, and there was particular interest around the topic of mental health training, not just for youth leaders, but for pastors, parents, etc.
- M7. **MDT programming**. Alysa shared a calendar showing potential programming for the next three years. There was a question about the Pastors' Wives Retreat on the calendar for Fall 2024. Feedback has been positive for those that have attended in the past. It does exclude the spouses of female pastors and consideration has been given to making it a Pastors' Spouse retreat in the future. The Pastor/Spouse Retreat scheduled for this fall excludes single pastors. It cannot be changed for this year, but changes will be considered for the next retreat, two years from now. Encouragement was given to follow through on the Pastor/Leadership Team Retreat scheduled for Fall 2024. It would be very helpful for some of our leadership teams
- M8. **Foundations for Justice training.** Last year, the Leadership Team arranged for this training series and asked that all Ohio Conference personnel participate, either live or by watching the videos. New personnel should view the videos. Ann will share the link for viewing the training videos.
- M9. **Missional Resource Team**. The Missional Resource Team was created a number of years ago. Its primary focus each year has been to plan the pre-ACA Missional Conference, but they also worked with the Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI) for a number of years with Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) while that program was active. The members on this team have changed over the years, and the group has struggled with knowing its mission. Engagement on the team was low this year. There was some talk of

giving this group a strategic pause, especially with the strategic planning that is happening this year and not knowing what the new structure will look like. There was a call, however, for planning a pre-ACA missional conference for 2024. Some suggestions were given for a possible focus. For now, Alysa will work at finding persons to work at a one-year only commitment of planning next year's missional conference.

- M10. **Missional Grants for 2023-2024**. Paula explained briefly our grant program and asked for suggestions in regards to the application. Ann will tweak the application and find out the amount available for grants for this year. The grant application deadline will be Aug. 4, 2023.
- M11. **Next meeting**. The next meeting will be a joint Zoom meeting with the Leadership Team and Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi on June 15, 2023 at 9 a.m.

Judy King, recorder

Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA Aug. 22, 2023 Ministry Development Team Meeting #2 Zoom meeting

**Present:** Dick Barrett, Paula Snyder Belousek (chairperson), Andrew Blount, Tony Doehrmann, David Elkins, Valerie Jones, Alan Kauffman, Judy King, Ann Leaman, Alysa Short

Absent: Joel Shenk

- M12. Welcome and opening devotions. Paula welcomed everyone to the meeting, and Dave Elkins led the devotional time, sharing from the writings of Shane Claiborne on the theme of justice. Justice is often mis-represented. In the Bible, the same word is used for justice and righteousness. The best translation is restorative justice, bringing balance and wholeness back to a community. He led in prayer.
- M13. Minutes. The minutes from the May 2, 2023, meeting were approved as presented. M/S/P
- M14. **Conference Minister Report.** Dick reported that he and Tony continue to work with congregations regarding the affiliation question. Leadership Team is working toward filling an interim conference minister position and an interim regional pastor position for the east.
- M15. **Regional Pastor Report.** Tony shared that John David Thacker has been affirmed at Zion to join their collaborative ministry team, beginning Oct. 1. His installation is scheduled for Oct. 8.
- M16. **Coordinator of Volunteers Report**. Prior to the meeting, Alysa sent a written report with a list of recent events and upcoming events for review. She highlighted the following:
  - The deadline to register for the Pastor-Spouse retreat is Sept. 1 and there are presently only eight couples registered. Everyone was asked to encourage their pastor couple to attend.
  - The Women in Leadership retreat is planned for Feb. 2-3, 2024, at Lial Renewal Center in Whitehouse, Ohio. Jewel Gingerich Longenecker (from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) will be the input speaker. The theme will be "Finding Your Voice," and the purpose is to encourage women in current church leadership as well as to tap and encourage women with leadership gifts. In order to offer the retreat at a reasonable cost to participants, Ministry Development Team (MDT) funds are needed. Ideally, each congregation would send someone to this retreat. This event is open to women outside the Ohio Conference. Only 20 rooms are available at the venue, but Alysa said that retreat planners would be willing to work at finding alternate lodging for additional participants if needed.

# Action. A motion was made to approve up to \$2,500 from the MDT line item to cover the costs of the Women in Leadership retreat not covered by registration fees. M/S/P

 ACA. The theme for ACA 2024 will be Following Jesus Together with a Common Mission, based on Philippians 2:5-11. The speaker is close to being confirmed. Rather than having a separate pre-ACA missional event this time, ACA will begin on Friday morning in order to incorporate the speaker's input into ACA for everyone to hear. In the past, MDT has helped to underwrite the costs of a pre-ACA missional conference. There was a question about whether or not MDT can still help subsidize the costs of the weekend in order to keep the registration fee low. It was suggested that MDT funds could help underwrite the costs of providing a resource for each participant.

### Action. A motion was made to approve \$2,500 for a resource for participants at ACA. M/S/P

- Planning calendar. We have previously spoken of offering a Pastor/Leadership Team Retreat as well as a Pastors' Wives Retreat for Fall 2024. There was discussion around these two events and if we need to change the focus of the Pastors' Wives Retreat to be able to accommodate the spouses of female pastors. There was discussion on the degree of participation in the past and the leadership of this event, which has largely been planned by several of the participants, many of whom are now retired. It was suggested that we get further input from those persons that would be impacted by a decision on this event before we move forward or drop it. Planning for the Pastor/Leadership Team Retreat was strongly affirmed.
- Winter Read. After some discussion, it was decided to focus on the book Not Quite Fine: Mental Health, Faith and Showing Up for One Another by Carlene Hill Byron. It was suggested as a good book study for everyone, but also to help parents engage in conversations with their youth. Several names were suggested as facilitators for this book study. Alysa will make contacts with potential leaders.
- Youth resourcing. Alysa, Jared Chase and Keith Lyndaker Schlabach met again a few months ago to discuss what Ohio Conference should we be doing to resource our youth. If churches are not sending their youth to convention, does that responsibility fall to Ohio Conference to offer a larger gathering? Do we need to offer more for our youth? What are some possibilities? The group was encouraged to think about it for further discussion.
- M17. **Ohio Conference Cast**. It was noted that the podcast hasn't been very regular lately. We do not presently have any permanent hosts. It was suggested that a podcast following the cluster meetings to introduce new staff would be helpful. A name was suggested as a possible host for this interview. Paula will make the contact. Tony and Dick were encouraged to mention this need at pastor peer groups and ask for interested persons to take on the role of podcast host.
- M18. Cluster meetings/welcoming new staff. It was reported that new staff persons will be introduced at all delegate cluster meetings.
- M19. **Review of reports from 2022-2023 grants**. Paula briefly reviewed the reports from last year's recipients. Alysa reported that the community garden in Archbold is beautiful.
- M20. **Missional Grants for 2023-2024**. Paula reported that we have a total of \$7,395 available for grants this year. The grant proposals that were submitted were reviewed using the criteria set forth in the application. These grants are offered each year according to a directive from the delegates at the 2012 ACA to use a portion of accumulated surplus funds each year for ministry projects. Grants approved for this year:
  - Millersburg Mennonite Refugee Resettlement program \$1,500
  - Disarming Violence event (Central Mennonite) \$1,000
  - Raw Tools Capacity Increase (Toledo Mennonite) \$1,000
  - Generator work needed as a designated regional emergency/disaster community shelter (Salem, Waldron, Mich.) – \$3,895

# Action. A motion was made that we approve the above list of grants for a total of \$7,395 to be dispersed from the accumulated surplus funds. M/S/P

Andrew noted that the formula for determining the amount of grant monies available has changed. It may be something to keep in mind as strategic planning moves forward. The conversation needs to be continued.

M21. **Next meeting**. The next meeting will be a joint meeting with the Leadership Team on Oct. 12, 2023, at the Upper Sandusky Public Library.

Judy King, recorder

### Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA Dec. 11, 2023 Ministry Development Team Meeting #3 Zoom meeting

**Present:** Paula Snyder Belousek (chairperson), Andrew Blount, Tony Doehrmann, Valerie Jones, Alan Kauffman, Judy King, Dan Miller, Ann Leaman, Larry Rohrer, Alysa Short

### Absent: Joel Shenk

- M22. Welcome and opening devotions. Paula welcomed everyone to the meeting. Valerie Jones led the devotional time, reading Luke 2: 8-18. She noted that the shepherds were considered the lowliest of the low at that time, yet they were the ones to receive the good news of the birth of Jesus. They were the ones to spread the word, telling all what they had seen. We need to be open to listening and hearing what the word of God would have for us. Valerie led in prayer.
- M23. **Introductions.** Time was spend introducing ourselves to Dan Miller and Larry Rohrer and giving them time to introduce themselves to us.
- M24. Minutes. The minutes from the Aug. 22, 2023, meeting were approved as presented. M/S/P
- M25. **Conference Budget for 2024-2025.** Andrew had sent the proposed budget previously, along with an explanation from the Stewardship Ministry Team that outlined the reasons for the changes reflected in the budget proposal. Andrew reviewed the budget and the changes that are reflected in this draft. It reflects the reality of declining revenue. It reflects the inclusion of the interim conference minister and regional pastor contracts which are for one year. It reflects the staffing changes that are included in the proposed strategic plan that will be presented to delegates for approval.

In order to present a balanced budget, it includes a substantial withdrawal from capital funds, if needed, to fund the budget. The last two years also included this safety net, but for various reasons the Conference has never needed to withdraw as much as was budgeted. Although Ministry Development Team (MDT) members are uncomfortable with the amount listed, they want to see Conference continue to prioritize programming and staffing. This budget will also be reviewed by the Leadership Team as well as delegates at the winter cluster meetings. The team wishes to be kept informed if the proposed budget goes through any changes.

### Action. The proposed spending plan for the 2024-2025 fiscal year was approved as presented. M/S/P

#### M26. Regional Pastor Updates.

- Tony affirmed the programming for the Pastor-Spouse Retreat and reported that it was very enjoyable. He invited us to think about what we can do for pastors that are single. In the west, West Clinton Mennonite made the decision to leave Ohio Conference. Others are in conversation, but nothing is happening immediately. (Paula echoed her thanks for the pastor spouse retreat.)
- Larry reported that there is one congregation in the east that is in conversation about whether or not to stay with Ohio Conference.
- M27. **Ohio Conference Cast**. Although there have been no podcasts for some time, there is interest in scheduling one to introduce both Larry Rohrer and Dan Miller. An interview with Meghan Good was also suggested as a way to promote her presence at ACA as the featured speaker.

#### M28. Coordinator of Volunteers Report. Alysa reported on the following:

 Pastor-Spouse Retreat – Expenses were not as high as anticipated because there were fewer couples than expected. She noted that Valerie did a great job with the gift bags for each couple.

- Women in Leadership retreat Registrations are low at the present time, but it is still early in the
  registration window. Emails were sent last week to churches and leadership teams asking them to
  encourage their folks to register. Emails were also sent directly to women on our email lists. We were
  encouraged to tap the shoulders of persons that would benefit from this retreat. We are encouraging
  each congregation to send at least one woman to the retreat.
- ACA The format will be different this year as we have Meghan Good coming as the featured speaker. We are encouraging both delegates and non-delegates to attend.
- Winter Read The featured book for this year's study is Not Quite Fine by Carlene Hill Byron. The book study sessions will be held via zoom on Thursday evenings in January and February. Darin Nissley and Emiley Shenk will lead the sessions. We are planning to record them this time since they will occur on the same evening as two of the winter cluster meetings.
- Grace and Groundings Resource Team This group is publishing an article in every other issue of *Ohio Evangel*. They are developing a series of four podcasts leading up to Social Justice Sunday in June, each one focusing on a different social justice topic. They plan to release one per month from February through May. Topics include homelessness and immigration. It was mentioned that Mennonite Mission Network does civil rights and borderlands tours for conferences and church groups, and these kinds of tours might be something to consider for Ohio Conference.
- Pastor/Leadership Team retreat This retreat is scheduled for fall 2024. Alysa would like suggestions of persons who might work with her to plan this retreat. Send suggested names to her.
- Pastors' Wives Retreat This retreat has traditionally been held in November in the years opposite those of the Pastor-Spouse retreat. Those that have participated in the past have found value in this retreat and would like to see it continue. It is important to find younger spouses to get involved going forward. There may be value in doing some kind of gathering for pastors' spouses in general, even if just a zoom meeting.
- Ohio Conference Youth Alysa met with Jared Chase and Keith Lyndaker Schlabach, former planners
  of an Ohio Conference youth workers retreat. What is the role that Ohio Conference needs to play for
  our youth, especially since we have some churches disaffiliated with Mennonite Church USA and will
  have no convention experience? A few suggestions were offered, but this topic was tabled until the next
  meeting.

M29. Next meeting. A date for the next meeting will be set through email correspondence.

Judy King, recorder

# **Ohio Conference Reports**

# **Ohio Conference Moderator**

We are thankful that 2023 continued the opportunity to have an in-person Annual Conference Assembly. Our delegates relished the ability to see, greet and fellowship together.

One hundred and ninety people participated in ACA 2023, including 152 delegates from 35 of 41 congregations.

We lamented the closing of Gilead Mennonite Church in January 2023, and Peace Mennonite ceased to exist as Peace Mennonite on April 10, 2022, as it merged with North Olmstead Evangelical Friends Church. We also rejoiced as the delegates unanimously approved a request from Akron Swahili Mennonite Church, Akron, Ohio, to become a member congregation of Ohio Conference.

Starting in April 2022, Ohio Conference Leadership, along with our process consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, held multiple gatherings of the Leadership Team, Ministry Development Team, credentialed pastors and congregational delegates groups leading up to the ACA meeting on March 3-4, 2023.

Delegates spent time in table group discussions led by our consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, and they offered feedback on the topic of reviewing the Conference's affiliation with Mennonite Church USA (MC USA).

The Leadership Team brought a resolution about leaving the denomination forward for the delegates to discern and vote on. The resolution required a 2/3 majority to affirm the Conference disaffiliation with MC USA. The delegate vote did not achieve the 2/3 majority, and by default Ohio Conference remained in affiliation with MC USA.

The ongoing challenges of the post-pandemic continued to stretch our congregations, pastors, and staff. Like many churches across the United States, our congregations are navigating decreased attendance.

Starting in April 2023, Ohio Conference, along with our process consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, held multiple gatherings of the Leadership Team, Ministry Development Team, credentialed pastors and our fall congregational delegate groups to develop a three-year strategic plan for the Conference. All the feedback from those groups has been compiled and is being prayerfully reviewed by our Strategic Planning Team. Incorporated in this strategic planning, the Leadership Team continues to be focused on supporting the Conference's key initiatives: missional discipleship, leadership development, and anti-racism.

During the winter delegate cluster meetings the strategic plan will be presented to delegates for review and final feedback before being put in a resolution format for action to be taken on it during the business session at ACA on March 1-2, 2024.

As part of our ACA 2024, Leadership has invited Meghan Larissa Good to be keynote speaker and worship leader. She will be presenting on her book *Divine Gravity: Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story*.

The Leadership Team said farewell to Conference Minister Dick Barrett officially on Oct. 13, 2023. During our fall cluster meetings, delegates showered Dick with cards, words and special gifts of ice cream equipment and supplies. Dick's leadership and support have been widely recognized and greatly appreciated. Dick will be greatly missed as he and his family begin a new chapter of their life journey.

We welcomed Dan Miller on Dec. 1, 2023, as the Interim Conference Minister and Larry Rohrer on Nov. 1, 2023, as the Interim Regional Pastor (East) to Conference leadership roles in Ohio Conference.

We are extremely grateful for all our dedicated staff and volunteers for their persistence in equipping and supporting pastors and congregations to carry out our mission. Without their invaluable service, our work would not be possible.

Respectfully submitted by Ken Sims, conference moderator

## **Ministry Development Team**

Ministry Development Team (MDT) has continued its work this year as the body responsible for implementing the purpose of Ohio Conference, which is to cultivate healthy congregations through equipping leaders in the areas of worship, faith and witness. One of the main ways that this work is carried out is through volunteer resource teams and the development of programs that are most often planned and implemented by our coordinator of volunteers, Alysa Short. We are grateful for not only Alysa but the work of Judy King and Ann Leaman, without whom we would not be able to do this work.

MDT has continued to work at our Conference-wide commitment to anti-racism and intercultural competency by again sponsoring Ohio Conference Winter Reads. This year we read *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson. This true story gave a heartrending account of the unequal justice most often experienced by those who are poor and/or people of color in the United States. This story also exposed the injustice built into the death penalty. Our study was ably led by Nathan Beachy and Pastor Rosalind Young, both of Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland. We are grateful that so many members from Lee Heights participated and willingly shared their own experiences and insights into racial inequality.

MDT sponsored a number of training events and retreats again this year. Unfortunately, due to low turnout some had to be cancelled. It seems the churches and individuals may still be finding their footing following the pandemic. MDT did provide a successful Pastor-Spouse Retreat that was smaller than in past years but appreciated by those

in attendance. MDT is exploring how to provide opportunities for rest and renewal for single pastors and is considering expanding this bi-annual event to include single pastors and the guest of their choice.

MDT has also been involved in the process of strategic planning, working with our consultant to review and update the constitution as well as to set the three-year strategic plan. This has required significant time both in person, online meetings and email. I am grateful for the willingness of MDT to support the Conference in this time of restructuring.

MDT also continued our practice of providing grants for missional activity across the conference. This year's grant recipients were:

- Millersburg Mennonite Church Refugee Resettlement Program to support a family coming from Congo \$1,500.
- Raw Tools Capacity Increase (Toledo Mennonite) to assist with creating a fully functional permanent blacksmithing workshop – \$1,000
- Generator work for designated regional emergency/disaster community shelter (Salem, Waldron, Michigan) \$3,895
- Disarming Violence event (sponsored by several northwest Ohio congregations) \$1,000

Respectfully submitted by Paula Snyder Belousek, chair of MDT, assistant moderator

## **Interim Conference Minister**

The mission of Ohio Mennonite Conference is 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.

I am privileged to join Ohio Conference as interim conference minister for a one-year term that began Dec. 1, 2023. While serving as an interim pastor on the Collaborative Ministry Team at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, I was caught off guard by Conference Minister Dick Barrett's retirement announcement. I had come to know Dick as a peer when I served as conference pastor for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. I appreciated Dick's heart. I am grateful for the care he expressed for Ohio Mennonite Conference in his words and actions.

I understand delegates adopted a new Conference vision statement in 2022, and approved a strategic planning process to help you live into the vision. This is important, because visions require planning and mobilizing. It was Zig Ziglar who said, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time."

Since the delegate vote on affiliation last March at ACA, there has been a careful process of inviting delegate conversation and constructing a strategic plan from delegate input. The draft plan is being tested and revised through delegate cluster meetings and will be brought to Annual Conference Assembly for delegate action in March.

Throughout 2024, we will continue living into the vision. If delegates approve the strategic plan in March, that will guide our steps. (I hope they approve it!) Change is unsettling. All reaction to change is normal. Change is normal, too. As followers of Jesus, we don't want to just change, we want to be transformed. So as we go through the changes I hope we can also pay attention to the Spirit's nudgings. How sad it would be if we moved through the strategic plan while members and congregations of Ohio Conference remained minimally transformed! The strategic plan is not about having a strategic plan, but about equipping pastors and congregations to live into the vision stated above.

In support of transformation, planners have invited Meghan Larissa Good to speak. Not just delegates, but everyone, is invited to come hear Meghan speak. She is a pastor, author and speaker who helps Christians dig deeply into scripture and makes surprising connections with our current world. She loves Jesus. She loves the church. Who could you bring along to be inspired and challenged by Meghan's presentations? In order to make it

easier for non-delegates to come just to hear her, the planners have scheduled times with Meghan for Friday afternoon and evening, and Saturday morning.

As we prepare for ACA I invite you to pray in this way:

- for those planning and leading Annual Conference Assembly
- for the spirit to guide delegates in their discernment (listening, speaking and voting)
- for guest speaker and teacher Meghan Larissa Good as she talks to us about Jesus-centered Christianity
- for congregations to grow as lovers of God and lovers of neighbor, and to more effectively make disciples

Dan Miller, interim conference minister

### **Regional Pastor Report - West**

#### Activities

I joined the Leadership Team in working with Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi on Ohio Conference strategic planning, and the revision of the Conference constitution. I attended OC pastoral staff and Ohio Conference cluster meetings, credentialed leaders meetings, and the Ohio Conference Leadership Team Retreat. It was a blessing to participate in several remote retreats offered by Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

I had the privilege of officiating at three installation services and preaching in several of our congregations throughout the year.

### Affirmations

Working with Ohio Conference Minister Dick Barrett for almost four years was enjoyable. He led with humility and grace, and the Conference will miss him. It is exciting that the Ohio Conference Leadership Team chose to call Dan Miller and Larry Rohrer as interim OC staff, and I look forward to working more closely with them.

Rhonda and I enjoyed attending the Pastor/Spouse Retreat again this year. Hat's off to the planning team and facilitator for the weekend! The retreat was a wonderful time to set church work aside, and a tremendous benefit for our pastors.

I'm encouraged by the way the OC Leadership Team and staff work together. They seem to enjoy interacting and can have fun tending to the work of Ohio Conference.

#### Concerns

It has been difficult to watch as the Conference lost member congregations and by extension, pastors from our pastor peer circles. It has been challenging for both pastors and congregations and has impacted relationships that were formed over the years.

#### Action Items

Interim Regional Pastor Larry Rohrer and I are working jointly on pastoral search efforts. I remain involved with Leadership Team members and our consultant in the areas of strategic planning and in preparing for upcoming delegate meetings.

I continue working with two pastor peer groups in the western region, and meeting with pastors one-on-one to check in periodically. I am attending a monthly breakfast for a group of pastors from various faith traditions for fellowship and support.

Tony Doehrmann, regional pastor west

## **Regional Pastor Report - East**

At the time of this writing, I have served as the eastern regional pastor of Ohio Conference for almost two months. This is a half-time interim role designed to minister to pastors and their congregations as the Conference Leadership prepares a new model for Ohio Conference. The current role of the regional pastor is to interact with pastors, building trust for accountability and sharing of resources as needed. The regional pastor also works with pastoral search committees, review committees, and other means of building relationships with pastors and their congregations.

To this point, much of my time has been spent in the 'getting acquainted' stage. A highlight at the very beginning of my term was to participate, along with my wife, in the pastor/spouse retreat at the Deer Creek Resort. We listened and laughed, making acquaintances and building friendships that will last for years to come. I highly recommend pastoral participation if this or similar opportunities are made available in coming years.

I have also been blessed to know several pastors through two pastor peer groups, one of which meets in person and the other by Zoom. In those monthly sessions, we share what is important in our lives and the lives of our families. We seek counsel from each other in the challenges of church life and we grow in the Christ presence among us.

As I write, soon the holidays of 2023 will be distant memories and congregations will be focused on the forward business of the church. Search committees are preparing for the good work of calling a pastor. Other congregations are anticipating pastoral reviews. Several leadership teams are discerning what brings life in the days ahead. In the meantime, I will be spending time with pastors, attending meetings (both Conference and congregational leadership), and interacting with the faithful in the holy calling of the church.

Larry Rohrer, interim regional pastor east

# **Coordinator of Volunteers**

I have now been in this position for over nine years. As many of you can probably relate, nine years go by very quickly! But nine years also offer lots of time to try things, fail, succeed, and learn. And nine years has given the opportunity to learn to know many of you and to work with a number of you in various ways as well. I truly value the relationships that I have built with you and find those relationships to be the best part of serving in this Coordinator of Volunteers position.

This past year I have found myself working on the Pastor-Spouse Retreat, 2024 Winter Read, Women in Leadership Retreat, ACA planning, and also beginning the planning for some events scheduled for late 2024. Grace & Groundings, the resource team focused on social justice and shalom, has also been actively working on an upcoming podcast series and other resources coming out this spring.

As Coordinator of Volunteers, I have been busy as part of the Leadership Team, Ministry Development Team, and Gifts Discernment Ministry Team. If this makes you think that I probably have a lot of meetings, you would be right! A major part of my position is to attend and coordinate meetings with others. Due to the geographic distance among our constituents, many of these meetings are conducted via Zoom at all hours of the day and evening.

As we get ready to begin another Conference year, I encourage you to consider both your and others' gifts and passions. Would you be willing to serve Conference in some way? How could you encourage someone else to become involved in Conference? It is in large part due to our many volunteers that Conference is able to offer the programming and resources that it does. How could you become involved in this good work?

In addition, if you have suggestions of events or programs that we should offer or have an idea for an initiative, please contact the conference office at <u>ohmc@zoominternet.net</u> or fill out a <u>form online</u>. Conference is here to resource you. Please let us know how we can best do that.

As we begin a new Conference year, may we be filled with peace and action.

Alysa Short, coordinator of volunteers

# **Credentialing Ministry**

It has been a year of transition for the Credentialing Ministry Team (CMT). We began the year with the following team members: Dee Custer, Doug King, Myron Weaver (chair), LaVerne Yousey, Dick Barrett (conference minister), and Judy King (recorder). Tony Doehrmann (regional pastor) participated as needed.

In March, Myron Weaver ended his term as chair. Thank you, Myron, for your excellent leadership during 2022! Joining the team were Larry Rohrer and Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach. Thank you, Rachelle, for being the CMT representative on the Leadership Team! Dee Custar resigned her position in July. Dick Barrett retired as conference minister in October, and Larry Rohrer ended his term in October due to taking on the role of interim regional pastor (East). We welcomed Dan Hooley and Rebecca Kauffman in October, and Interim Conference Minister Dan Miller in December.

We ended the year with the following team members: Doug King (chair), Dan Hooley, Rebecca Kauffman, Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, LaVerne Yousey, Dan Miller (interim conference minister) and Judy King (recorder).

The Credentialing Ministry Team met 10 times throughout 2023.

### Credentialing Activity:

Throughout the year the following persons were interviewed by the Credentialing Ministry Team, and credentials were granted for either licensing or ordination:

- Nathanael Hofstetter Ressler (Maple Grove Mennonite, Hartville) ordination
- Lucas Johnson (Valley View Mennonite, Spartansburg, Pa.) ordination
- Alvis Pettker (Friendship Mennonite, Bedford Heights) ordination
- Valentine Iroha (Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor (Good Shepherd) licensing toward ordination
- Hector Velez (Good Shepherd) renewed specialized license, chaplain
- Rosalind Young (First Mennonite, Canton) licensing toward ordination

The following ordination credentials were transferred to Ohio Conference:

John David Thacker (Zion Mennonite, Archbold) – transferred in from Virginia Conference

The following ordination credentials were transferred out of Ohio Conference:

- Sean Swanson (First Mennonite, Canton) to Indiana-Michigan Conference
- Haroldo Nunes (former Open Arms executive director) to Mosaic Mennonite Conference

The following ordination credentials were withdrawn:

• Ryan Harker (West Clinton Mennonite, Wauseon - left Ohio Conference)

The following licenses have expired due to the pastors' congregation leaving Ohio Conference:

- Brenna Harker (West Clinton Mennonite, Wauseon)
- Linda Riegsecker (West Clinton Mennonite, Wauseon)

Throughout the year we worked at making sure all credentialed pastors had access to the Healthy Boundaries training. The Conference requires all active pastors and chaplains to take Healthy Boundaries training to maintain their credential, renewable every 3-5 years. This policy is in line with what other area conferences are requiring. In 2024 Ohio Conference will provide the HB 201 refresher training (dates TBA).

The Ministerial Scholarship Aid program is an effort of the Ohio Conference Credentialing Ministry to be involved with the training, development, and improvement of ministerial leadership by providing financial assistance for formal educational training. A priority is that the educational experience must be inclusive of offering opportunities to become familiar with Anabaptist/believers' church history, perspectives on theology, and biblical studies. The Credentialing Ministry also affirms the values of Clinical Pastoral Education for current pastors or those preparing for ministry. LaVerne Yousey is currently our contact person for scholarships.

The Pastoral Misconduct flyer was updated, and we encouraged congregations to post it in their church buildings.

We finalized the *Code of Ethics* and *Common Commitments* documents and worked with the regional pastors to get credentialed leaders to sign and return them to the Conference office. We are working to get these forms translated into Swahili for our Congolese pastors.

The CMT works to encourage and support the credentialed leaders in Ohio Mennonite Conference. As we begin a new Conference year, the Credentialing Team welcomes your feedback. We long to serve the Conference in a way that brings hope and reflects the Kingdom of God.

Respectfully submitted by Doug King, chair

## **Gifts Discernment Ministry**

The theme word for the Gifts Discernment Ministry Team (GDMT) this year has been flexibility. Or perhaps a more theological sounding term—trust. The GDMT has been on quite the ride this year alongside of Ohio Conference. Jared Chase was the initial chair of the team, but due to a ministry transition, that role was passed to Matt Weaver, who stepped in as the chair in September. Flexibility needed.

As both Matt and the team got their feet under them for the task at hand this fall, we knew we were in for a challenge as the landscape of Ohio Conference has shifted over the last number of years. Alongside this, Ohio Conference has been undergoing its structural review and strategic planning process, which has led to changes in our structures and teams that we fill. At times, how we thought we were asking someone to serve changed from one meeting to the next because of the dynamics at play. Flexibility needed.

Our team of 10 that began the year became eight as the year progressed. And the eight who remained have been working diligently to fill slots and shift people from one role to another. As of this writing, in mid-December, we are still at work trying to adjust to the transitions happening in the Conference structures. We have been as flexible as we can, while trusting the Spirit of God's leading in the Conference and the ministry that we do together.

I want to say thank you to those on the team who have worked hard trying to make sense of everything that is happening and their ability to adapt as needed. On behalf of the team, we are grateful for those of you who have taken our phone calls and emails to consider serving this upcoming year. And especially to those of you who have said yes, thank you. Thank you for your willingness to serve the Conference as we strive to do the ministry of God, and embody the Good News of Jesus in our communities and the greater Ohio area. May God grant each of you the flexibility needed for the upcoming transitions, grace for the journey, and a determined hope in the God who gifts, and equips the saints for the work of ministry.

Grace and Peace, Matt Weaver, chair

## **Stewardship Ministry**

The Stewardship Ministry Team members include Steve Schmid, Chelsea Waidelich, Carolyn Kopec, Bruce Breckbill, and Andrew Blount. We met by a combination of Zoom and in-person gatherings.

The Stewardship Ministry continues the work of reviewing the monthly financial reports, reviewing the Conference's capital funds, and preparing the annual budget. Most of our attention has been on the decline in congregational giving to Conference. Last year, giving was \$30,000 below the five-year average. This year is trending to be \$50,000 below the five-year average.

The most significant expense for Ohio Conference is our staff salaries and benefits. Staff expenses are now over 3 /4 of Conference's budget, so as much as we do not want to make reductions to staff, it is the only place we can

make cuts that will do enough to balance receipts and spending. Current staff levels equal 4 FTE (Full time equivalent). Stewardship has recommended reducing that to 3 FTE split between full and part time staff. With the Conference already in the midst of a review, we committed to using some of our savings to allow adjustments to staffing levels to be informed by that review process rather than just cutting hours or positions.

At the same time we need to make cuts to expenses, the denomination salary guidelines include cost-of-living increases to adjust for inflation. Last year, that increase was approximately 8 percent. In last year's budget we increased staff wages by half that amount, splitting the increase between the past year and next. We are continuing that plan, and our current staff will see a 4 percent increase to their pay next year. Our interim staff salaries were set using those same adjustments.

We have a great appreciation for Conference staff, who handle the everyday business of Ohio Conference: Stan Helmuth, Judy King, Alysa Short, and Ann Leaman, as well as the pastoral team of Dick Barrett (retired), Tony Doehrmann, Dan Miller and Larry Rohrer.

Cutting expenses and using reserve funds will not balance the budget on their own, nor will it allow us to provide annual cost-of-living salary increases in future years. The financial support from our member congregations will also need to increase to continue the support for our staff and the work of Ohio Conference.

Andrew Blount, chair

### **Partner Organizations**

Partner Organizations have a distinct Mennonite identity and are self-governing with elements of mutual accountability with Ohio Conference. Brazo en Brazo and Open Arms have completed memorandums of understanding with Ohio Conference.

### Brazo en Brazo

Next year will mark 20 years since the inception of Brazo en Brazo as a ministry of several Northwest Ohio Mennonite Churches to "Hispanic individuals and families residing in Lima, Ohio, and neighboring communities." (Brazo en Brazo Vision and Mission Statement Document).

Brazo en Brazo means "Arm in Arm." Each year, between 50 and 100 individuals from 30-60 families are provided with services of translation, immigration paperwork support, tax preparation assistance, job interviews, transportation to medical or immigration appointments, school meetings and spiritual support by Marti Meza, Brazo en Brazo's staff person. The families served are living in Delphos, Lima, Findlay, Pandora, Leipsic, Kenton, and Elida. The families assisted are from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Guerrero and Chiapas in Mexico.

On Oct. 1, 2023, over 100 people from the supporting churches and from the Spanish-speaking immigrant community gathered for a Fiesta Familiar at Lima Mennonite Church. Current participating congregations are Lima Mennonite, Salem Mennonite in Elida, Grace Mennonite in Pandora, and First Mennonite in Bluffton. Thank you for your continued support of Brazo en Brazo!

Paul Neufeld Weaver, board chair

### **Open Arms Hispanic Ministry**

This has been a year of some significant changes for Open Arms Ministries. Implementing the strategic plan we had been putting together in 2021 and 2022 resulted in several positive changes, including a search and hiring of a community worker to assist the executive director. Through some divine orchestrations, Pablo Delgado was hired in January. In March, Executive Director Haroldo Nunes resigned, effective at the end of July. After a search and discernment process, Pablo accepted the executive director position. The strategic plan also included hiring

an Education Coordinator. That very time-consuming and demanding work was being done very capably by volunteer Kathy Troyer. Seneca Bowers was hired this summer to fill that position plus assist Pablo with community work. And to complete the staff changeover, Jennifer Hicks joined to replace Kelsey Troyer. She is also assisting in some community work. We also thank retiring board members Dan King and Kathy Troyer for their strong and able leadership in their respective roles. We welcome Lynne Hamrick as a new board member. We are blessed and well positioned with this staff as we welcome, accompany, and partner with Latino immigrants in building a safe and sustainable life.

We acknowledge and thank Haroldo and Esmirna (Mimi) Nunes and family for 25 years of faithful and caring service to the Latino community in Wayne County and surrounding areas. They were wonderful advocates for our Hispanic neighbors and worked tirelessly, helping the English and Latino communities to live together harmoniously. Their countless acts of kindness will not be forgotten. It was a blessing to have the seven months overlap with Haroldo to learn from him. I'm very motivated, very blessed and encouraged to do my best in seeking the Lord for the success of the organization.

We have had the blessing to participate in the Latino Summer Camp, and we were invited to MLK Civic Engagement Fair organized by the College of Wooster in the spring. We participated in the Immigration Conference in Columbus this year, organized by the National Association of Evangelicals, part of World Relief. Open Arms was also able to send me (Pablo) to an immigration training in the Welcoming Center in Akron, Pa., organized by Immigrant Legal Resource Center. I passed the exam, allowing me to become a Department of Justice Legal Representative for Latinos. Orrville schools invited us to their Latino Wellness Day fair.

We also feel very blessed and confident with our tutoring program. As we graduate some of the kids that had been there longer, we start with new kids that are needing help. I continue visiting and preaching in churches around the area, and one church in Wauseon, Ohio. We continue to serve the Latino families with transportation, interpretation, filling out forms for the government and schools, walking them through the process of applying for Medicaid or WIC, as well as helping them get driver's licenses. We are connecting families to churches, and resources like Salvation Army, Love Inc, and United Way. We are always trying to develop new relationships and find new ways to partner with organizations that share our vision.

Sustained funding continues to be a top priority for the board. Our Amigo group is growing. Amigos commit \$1,000 a year and are a very important group of people to the ongoing and growing ministry of Open Arms in a substantial way. Becoming an Amigo is knowing you have significantly assisted Open Arms to welcome, accompany, and partner with Latino immigrants in building a safe and sustainable life in our community.

Pablo Delgado, executive director

Ken Neuenschwander, board chair

### **Related Organizations**

Related Organizations have expressed objectives to enrich the life and witness of Ohio Conference members. A memorandum of understanding with Ohio Conference is encouraged. Note: the Partner Organization and Related Organization criteria were new with the adoption of the 2007 Constitution of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA to better define and enhance an on-going working relationship.

### **Central Christian School**

We are experiencing a wonderful school year with renewed energy, refreshed spirits, and reliable wisdom. Reflecting on Galatians 4:4-7, a twelfth grade student asked the question in her Senior Seminar class, "What does it truly mean to be free in Christ?" Listening to the students contemplate and comment reminded me of the sacred and unique learning experience students encounter at Central Christian School. It is nearly impossible to work at Central and not be aware and amazed by God's grace and wisdom. We are centered by our enduring vision, "To know Christ and to make Him known," and by the blessings of a loving, caring community who empower the mission of our school. Coupled with a purposeful, Christ-centered education, and rooted in Anabaptist theology, our priority is consistent enrollment and financial sustainability. We have experienced consecutive years of positive growth in enrollment and current trends indicate solid, manageable growth in the future. Central is committed to maintaining a tuition model that is fiscally prudent and attainable for all families seeking private, Christian education through fair balanced tuition, income-based and need-based scholarships. Our school distributes around \$700,000 annually through the Fair Balance Tuition Fund. Guided by our admission policies, we enroll students and partner with families who align with our mission and values, who are willing to covenant according to the school's core documents which include the *1995 Mennonite Confession of Faith* and our institution's founding documents (our constitution, Seven Core Convictions, Anabaptist Faith Practices, and Core Authorities).

Also, the State of Ohio is committed to providing all children access to quality educational opportunities. Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program gives all Ohio students the opportunity to attend the school of their choice. State funds move through a "voucher" to private schools, or follow a student who moves to a public school out of their district. As a private, non-public chartered school, students must satisfy both household income requirements and student eligibility criteria to qualify for a full or partial scholarship.

Another opportunity that we are excited about is a new way to give to Central, tax-free. Ohio taxpayers may reduc their state tax liability by making a contribution through Servant Partners, our Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO). The contribution may be claimed when you file your Ohio taxes for the year in which you make the contribution. This credit is a dollar-for-dollar reduction of your Ohio state tax liability up to \$750 per taxpayer which can be used for need-based scholarships. More information will be provided soon about this opportunity.

Lastly, Central has been deeply active and immensely supported in the "Forward in Faith" campaign that continue to see progress on upgrading and expanding our building and grounds. Sitework, storm water drainage and pavin of the north, eastern, and southern driveways and parking areas were completed over the summer. The Board approved the signing of a contract with Weaver Commercial Contractor to complete renovations and expansion or the cafeteria, kitchen, concessions and warm-up kitchen, with broad support, no long-term debt, and funding from Central's "Secure the Future" Fund. This fund prioritizes building cash reserves for special projects. This project is underway and should be complete by the first of August 2024. We continue to be overwhelmed by our generous, supportive community which enables us to continue sharing Central Christian School's enduring vision "To know Christ and make Him known."

Thank you for serving, overseeing and supporting what God is doing through Central Christian School.

Nate Holten, superintendent

### 2023 Ohio Conference of MC USA Report Todd Hanes, Adriel President & CEO

In Fiscal Year 2023 Adriel served 364 youth through foster care and licensed 32 new foster homes, 22 of which were licensed as treatment level foster families (who are able to care for children with additional medical needs and/or additional behavioral needs). Adriel was able to license the new Adriel Foster Families within an average of 6 months and maintained the licenses of 151 Adriel Foster Families. In addition, Adriel provided 1,993 hours of family preservation services to families, facilitated the reunification of 39 children with their biological parents, the placement of 58 children with a kinship family, and the adoption of 31 children into their foster family.

Thanks to the unwavering generosity of our donors, churches, and the wider community, Adriel has been able to organize a variety of meaningful events and programs for our foster families and youth. This support has allowed us to host appreciation events and festive Christmas parties, ensuring each foster family, child, and young adult in the Bridges program receives a special gift for the holiday season.

Additionally, this backing has made it possible for foster youth to enjoy Adriel Day at Cedar Point with free admission, creating memorable experiences. We also celebrate significant moments like birthdays and adoptions, marking these with thoughtful gifts. Beyond these celebrations, our foster parents receive enhanced training and support, helping them provide the best care possible. All these initiatives are a testament to the profound impact of community support in enriching the lives of those in our care.

Adriel foster care consultant, Katie Ball was named Adriel's 2023 Consultant of the Year for her work with newly licensed foster parents. Her families rely on her for guidance on managing difficult behaviors and she uses creative motivation systems to help children progress on their goals. Katie's knowledge of the Teaching-Family Model helps her provide updated resources to families and first-hand observation during home visits. Katie's passion for enriching the lives of children was recognized at the 2023 Teaching-Family Association Conference.





In early 2022, Adriel's development office embarked on an ambitious three-year capital campaign to revitalize the Yoder Activity Center at the West Liberty Campus. This initiative was launched in response to the Center's need for vital updates, including a new roof and heating system, after serving the community faithfully for 35 years.

Constructed in 1986 in honor of John L. Yoder, the Yoder Activity Center has been a cornerstone of Adriel's educational and recreational offerings. Originally built to host Adriel's school and residential summer programs, it featured classrooms, a gymnasium, kitchen, and cafeteria. Over the years, the Center's role has evolved,

now serving not only as a venue for Adriel's special events but also as a resource for other community organizations.

The campaign's success, achieved by early fall 2023, was made possible through the generous contributions of community groups, churches, and individual donors. This collective support underscores the shared commitment to maintaining and enhancing a space that has long been a hub of learning, activity, and community engagement.

Adriel





Across the United States, a significant number of youth, exceeding 391,000, are currently in foster care, with Ohio providing a nurturing environment for over 16,000 of these children. Adriel has the geographic scope to potentially support more than half of these children and their families. To make this a reality, we are actively seeking more compassionate individuals willing to become foster parents and create a loving home for these children.

In recent years, Adriel has faced challenges, including a decline in the total number of foster homes and difficulties in both licensing new homes and retaining our existing foster families. During FY23, Adriel received referrals for 2,860 children in need of foster care placement. Unfortunately, due to the current shortage of foster homes in various Ohio communities, we were not able to place all these children in our foster care program.



This situation underscores the urgent need for more individuals and families to step forward and join our mission in providing safe, loving homes for these children. Every new foster parent can make a significant difference in the lives of these young people, helping us to fulfill our goal of caring for and supporting them in their time of need.

Encouragingly, even with a smaller budget for marketing, the interest in becoming foster parents has seen a significant increase over the past fiscal year. This surge in inquiries is a testament to the community's growing awareness and willingness to help. Adriel's #BeTheOne campaign has been instrumental in highlighting the critical need for a diverse group of foster families. It focuses on bridging the gap between children in dire need of support and those in the community eager to make a meaningful difference.

We are immensely grateful for the continuous support, prayers, and commitment to the #BeTheOne initiative. Your dedication to supporting children and families with the spirit of Christian love is deeply valued and plays a vital role in strengthening our community.

Adriel







### **2023 Report to Supporting Churches**

### Programs

Summer camp was well attended, with over 400 campers participating. Many families continue to share of the impact that Camp has had on the faith formation of their children. Six young people even made the decision to be baptized at Camp during the final week of our summer program. We are grateful for relationships with families and pastors that allowed for these lifechanging moments to take place.

Finding volunteers to join the summer staff team has been a limiting factor for growth of the summer camp program. Camp Luz will again be offering up to eleven \$1,000 scholarships for college age summer staff members who commit to working most of the summer. More information and the application for summer staff can be found on the website.

The 2024 summer theme is "Thoroughly Equipped", based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Campers will be invited to consider how God is and has been equipping them to live lives that reflect their faith and

draw others into relationship with Jesus. Summer registration is open and the Early-bird discount deadline is April 15.

### 2024 Strategic Planning

The staff and board of Camp Luz will meet in late January for the purpose of strategic planning. An outside consultant has been asked to assist with this process. While these planning retreats normally take place every few years, this will be the first such retreat since the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Staff Transitions**

Kirsten Fenstermaker bid farewell to her role as program director in December, and the search is on to find the person God is calling to this critical year-round position. The program director is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of a variety of programs aimed at helping participants grow in their faith in Jesus Christ. The position will be filled in early 2024.

### Ways to Support and Connect

- Keep the board and staff in your prayers as we continue planning for the future of the ministry at Camp Luz.
- Spread the word about upcoming programs and help us find excellent summer staff members.
- Volunteer- individually or as a small group; there is always work to do.
- Give- Camp Luz relies on churches and individuals to help keep the cost of our programs affordable.
- Invite us to come share with your church or group about Camp Luz and the vision for future ministry.

### Thank you for your partnership in freely proclaiming the radical hope of Jesus Christ to the next generation!

### Realize Anabaptist Disabilities Network **Annual Report 2023**

### **ADN in the Community:**

### Accessibility Services at MC USA Convention

Mobility aids, hearing assistance devices, slide transcriptions for screen readers, sensory rooms, etc.

### **Congregational Visits**

- Visited 25 congregations in-person or online.
- Preached **8** sermons in congregations on disability.

### **Workshops and Trainings**

- Led 10 workshops and classes for congregations.
- Led **3** workshops at conferences: EMU School for Leadership Training, AMBS Pastors & Leaders Conference, MC USA Convention.

Barrier-Free Grants of up to \$500 for any project that increases the accessibility of your congregation.

• Awarded 8 Barrier-Free Grants.

### **Accessibility Audits**

 Conducted and/or evaluated 14 Congregational Assessment Surveys, awarding accessibility seals

### **New Resources for Congregations:**

Believing and Belonging: An Accessible Anabaptist Membership *Curriculum* for youth and adults written at a third-grade reading level and illustrated.

### **Connections Newsletter**

- Young Adult Mental Health, Winter 2023
- Disability, Nature, and Faith, Summer 2023
- Youth and Disability, Fall 2023

### Opening Doors blog on disability inclusion

### Webinars

- MHS Association Panel Discussion Every Part of Us: Community, Our Lives
- A Small World: Building Resiliency and Hope after Childhood Trauma
- Baptism and Membership
  - Becoming the Baptized Body: Disability and the Practice of Christian Community
  - o Believing and Belonging: An Accessible Anabaptist Membership Curriculum

### **Be Involved:**

Become a Partner Congregation. Designate a congregational disability advocate who will work with church leaders to make your church a place where everyone belongs and everyone serves. Become a Sustaining Partner Congregation with a congregational donation of \$500 or \$1000 annually.

Become a Building the Future Partner: As an individual, donate \$1000 per year for 3 years. Or give what you can; small donations make a significant difference.

www.anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org • 574-323-1362 • adnet@adnetonline.org



Accessible Playground - Plains Mennonite



Accessible Entrance – Hyattsville Mennonite



Hannah and Carrie Norris reading Believing and Belonging



ADN Field Associate Sarah Werner on the trail

"People plan their path, but the Lord secures their steps."

- Proverbs 16:9 (CEB)

### Everence revamps advocate program

Exciting changes are happening with the Everence<sup>®</sup> church stewardship program in 2024!

After working with churches, advocates and stewardship consultants, the redesigned Everence Stewardship Partners program will include major enhancements – including expanded participation opportunities for pastors and other stewardship leaders, and the possibility for participating churches to be eligible for up to \$3,000 a year in Sharing Funds.

Everence has been building strong relationships with churches for over 30 years through its church stewardship program, and today more than 1,100 churches participate. Go to <u>everence.com/partners</u> to learn more about the changes.

### Sharing Fund helps churches impact their community



When the going gets tough, we have community to lift each other up. Churches can make an impact in their community by helping their members through a Sharing Fund grant.

# Your Mission. Your Finances.

Everence 2024 report

### Ohio Conference Annual Assembly March 1-2, 2024

The Everence Sharing Fund program helps thousands of families and individuals every year. In fact, over the last five years alone, the Sharing Fund has distributed nearly 9,000 grants for a total of \$4.7 million – all of which was matched by an additional \$7.1 million from churches.

You can support the Everence Sharing Fund with a fully taxdeductible donation, and 100% of your gift will go to meet financial needs. Visit <u>everence.com/sharing-fund</u> to donate or learn more.

### MyNeighbor card a tool for giving to charitable causes



With the Everence Federal Credit Union MyNeighbor credit card program, individuals, businesses and churches generate reward dollars for their favorite nonprofits every time they make a purchase.

Whenever a cardholder uses their MyNeighbor card to buy groceries, pay bills or make other purchases, Everence donates 1.50% of the purchase total to the charity of his or her choice. Then in January, Everence writes and sends checks to the selected 501(c)(3) public charitable organizations. In January 2023, Everence distributed over \$500,000 in donations to support nonprofits, including individual churches.

Want to know more? Visit everence.com/myneighbor.

### Find a stewardship advocate for your church



Want to learn how a healthy stewardship ministry can contribute to your church's ministry? An Everence stewardship advocate can help encourage and inspire your faith community toward greater understanding and practice of biblical stewardship.

Everence stewardship advocates are volunteers who work with your church's pastor and other leaders to support and strengthen your church's mission and ministry by sharing resources designed to help church attenders live out faith values in their financial decisions.

Want to learn more about how a stewardship advocate can contribute to your congregation? Talk to your Everence stewardship consultant and/or visit <u>everence.com/advocates</u>.





# **2024 report for** Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

### MCC U.S. and MCC Great Lakes

(574) 534.4133 • GreatLakes@mcc.org • mcc.org



Adolfo Conde's water harvesting system in Norte de Potosí, Bolivia, allows him to irrigate his crops to produce and market a greater variety of vegetables. An MCC partner works with Indigenous rural farmers to reduce the adverse effects of climate change through adaptation and mitigation measures aimed at guaranteeing food security. (PRODII photo/Catalina Ospina)

### MCC and Ohio Mennonite Conference connections

- Ohio Conference congregations play important roles in MCC relief sales, thrift shops, My Coins Count fundraisers and meat canning. They also help with comforter bashes and material resources drives, including the 2023 school kit campaign.
- Various congregations hosted MCC speakers, either virtually or in person.
- Ohio Conference churches and families are hosting International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) participants.

- Lighthouse Ministries in Canton participated in the Summer Service program.
- A group of volunteers from Beech Mennonite Church served with SWAP in Elkhorn City, Kentucky.
- Virgil Troyer represents Ohio Conference and serves as chair of the MCC Great Lakes Board. Marcia Richer Lehman also serves on the Great Lakes Board (term ending March 2024). Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi serves on the MCC U.S. Board.



MCC's 2024 guiding scripture

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

### Colossians 3:15 (NIV)

MCC is able to work in 45 countries because of strong partnerships, not only with organizations on the ground but also with supporters like you.

You're helping farmers in Bolivia grow more diverse crops, even in difficult land. In Ukraine, you're helping families access food, shelter and trauma support. And in Chicago, you're helping young people who are currently incarcerated find hope and create a brighter future.

We are grateful for each of you and the role that you play. Whether you donate financially, pray for MCC, volunteer at an MCC thrift shop, pack kits, knot comforters, help can meat or bid on items at a relief sale, we appreciate you. You are helping to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

With thanksgiving,

Eric Kurtz, MCC Great Lakes executive director

Virgil Troyer, MCC Great Lakes Board representative for Ohio Mennonite Conference

**G** It's beautiful to see the ways that people put aside their differences and unite together to support MCC's mission."

-Eric Kurtz

In McDowell County, West Virginia, MCC is working with local community members to highlight the often-forgotten history of the Black experience in Appalachia. Monthly gatherings offer a space for telling stories and learning from shared experiences. In Kimball, MCC's SWAP location was found to once hold the Henrietta Dismukes Hospital and Nurses' Home, founded by Dr. Henry Dodford Dismukes in the 1930s. SWAP staff and local residents are working together to honor the history and legacy of Dr. Dismukes as well as Dr. Roscoe Conklin Harrison, who both experienced racism and injustices as African American doctors.





### Mennonite Church USA equipped, empowered and gathered the church together in many ways in 2023.



The annual <u>Hope for the Future</u> conference in Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 3-5, 2023, brought together 70 Black, Indigenous and people of color from across the church to worship, network and honor legacy leaders.

More than 1,400 youth and adults attended <u>MennoCon23</u>, MC USA's leading faith formation event, in Kansas City, Missouri, July 5-8, 2023, where they were invited to "Be Transformed" by the Holy Spirit.

The **Delegate Assembly**, leading decision-making body, convened in July 2023, voting to clarify the MC USA bylaws and shift Everence and MHS Association from program agencies to ministry partners.

MC USA expanded its Peace & Justice work to include a deeper emphasis on climate justice. Three hundred youth and young adults attended MC USA's <u>Climate Summit</u> in Kansas City, July 7, 2023, where they put their faith to work, addressing the spiritual and human crisis caused by climate change.



In 2023, MC USA's Justice Fund provided

resources to five congregations who are sharing the reconciling work of Christ by alleviating poverty, dismantling racism, addressing immigration reform or reimagining policing in their communities.

MC USA launched <u>Safe Church</u>, a new abuse prevention ministry to equip and educate conferences and congregations to protect the most vulnerable among us.

MC USA reinforced the church's peace mission by honoring denominational peacemakers Jonathan Kuttab and Sydney Leah Bontrager with the 2023 <u>Bring the Peace</u> award.

The <u>Learn, Pray, Join: End Gun Violence</u> initiative called the denomination to understand this crisis through the lens of our Anabaptist faith and to inspire action to bring God's healing to our hurting communities.



MC USA collaborated with Mennonite Church Canada to host the annual Binational <u>Conference</u> <u>Minister/Regional Pastors Re-</u> <u>treat</u> in Banff, Canada, in Nov. 2023, where leaders focused on worship and pastoral wellbeing.



### **Our Mission**

The mission of the MC USA Executive Board is to equip and empower leaders to share with others the gift of God's peace and transformative love.

### **Our Vision**

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

### **Our Renewed Commitments**

- Follow Jesus
- Witness to God's peace
- Experience transformation

### **Church Vitality**

MC USA's Church Vitality team empowers and equips the church every day through:

- Pastor salary guidelines
- Wellbeing in ministry resources
- The Corinthian Plan healthcare plan for church workers
- Ministerial Leadership Inquiry process

Learn more here.







Subscribe to MC USA's weekly email newsletter.

### www.MennoniteUSA.org





Greetings, Ohio Conference!

The Corinthian Plan (TCP) is now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year. TCP is sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and continues to offer health coverage, Life and Disability, and optional Dental and Vision coverages.

This year TCP added a higher deductible to offer a more cost-effective option and to compete with the higher deductibles of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchanges. Since 2010 TCP has not changed its deductible levels. In comparison to the ACA our benefits have risen from the silver level up one to the gold level. That is one below the highest ACA level.

Medical costs and premiums continue to be a challenge. Since its inception, premium increases for The Corinthian Plan have been almost half of the industry average since 2010 even if it does not always feel that way.

If you are participating in The Corinthian Plan, don't forget to participate in our Wellness Incentives. Each participant can receive up to \$300 per year by engaging two different incentive options worth \$150. Even spouses not participating are eligible for the Wellness Incentive. More information can be found at our Wellness Incentive <u>webpage</u>.

Thank you for your participation! Ohio Mennonite Conference Participation Summary:

- 18 Ohio Conference congregations and the Conference staff participate in The Corinthian Plan.
- 13 congregations and the Conference office carry active (CEP) health coverage
- 2 participate by waiving health coverage
- 3 participate without an eligible employee
- There are no Ohio Conference congregations currently receiving a monthly subsidy

Eligible employees also carry Life and Disability coverages, and The Corinthian Plan offers optional Vision and Dental coverage.

Finally, whether your congregation is on The Corinthian Plan or not, health coverage is an important benefit that helps provide security for your pastor or other church staff. Be aware of their health coverage needs and do what you can to support them in securing coverage.

For more information for The Corinthian Plan go to our webpages <u>here.</u> Your Area Advocate is also available for questions, <u>Joe Christophel</u>.

The Corinthian Plan is overseen by the Church Benefits Board with the following members at the time of this writing: Paul Leaman, chair (Harrisonburg, Va.), Tom Charles (State College, Pa.), Jasmine Harris (Hampton, Va.), Ken Hochstetler (Goshen, Ind.), Mark King (Goshen, Ind.), Monica Miller (Hesston, Kan.), and Deanna Risser (Goshen, Ind.).

Report submitted by Duncan Smith, TCP Director 45



Report to Ohio Mennonite Conference December 2023

### Strengthening the church through education

### INAUGURAL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

MEA has awarded the first recipients of a new scholarship for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students within MC USA. Each MEA partner school is eligible for up to \$4,000 annually to further the education of future church leaders. As funds increase, so will the number of scholarships available. The recipients were chosen based on their leadership on their campuses and active participation in the MC USA congregations. Five outstanding students were selected for the 2023-24 academic year: (from top) Eliza Alemán, Goshen (Ind.) College, \$4,000; Josué Coy Dick, Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., \$4,000; Olufemi Fatunmbi. Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind., \$1,000; Hyun Hur, AMBS, \$1,000; and Alicia Maldonado-Zahra, AMBS, \$2,000. "We were looking for leaders in the church, and they showed up!" said Executive Director Michael Danner. For the 2024-25 academic year, scholarship applications are due April 1, 2024. Details about the scholarship and the application can be found online at www.MennoniteEducation.org/schools/ mea-scholarship-for-bipoc-students/.

### **NEW WEBSITE**

Having outgrown the old site, MEA launched a new website in April. The new site offers user-friendly search features for degree programs and faith formation resources, a communications hub for news from across Mennonite education and Mennonite Church USA, as well as time-honored resources such as the prayer calendar, job board, and enrollment reports – all wrapped up in a sharp, new look. Shé Langley, the founder of <u>RankLift</u> digital marketing agency, designed the site to improve functionality, provide interactive elements, and enhance the overall user experience. Site navigation is also improved, with intuitive accessibility. To learn more about MEA's mission and work, and to experience the new website, visit <u>www.MennoniteEducation.org</u>.











### MEA HISPANIC MINISTRIES-AMBS GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN THEOLOGY

MEA and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) have partnered to develop the first Spanish language graduate certificate in theology at an MC USA seminary. The fully online MEA Hispanic Ministries -AMBS Graduate Certificate in Theology will be taught entirely in Spanish and is designed to provide professionals, congregational leaders, and bivocational pastors with a foundation in theological and biblical study. The 21-credit-hour certificate consists of seven courses to be completed in two and half years. Graduates will then be eligible to enroll in AMBS's English-language master's-level programs. The program launched this fall with a cohort of 12 students "We are pioneering graduate-level theological education in Spanish," said Marco Güete, Director of Hispanic Ministries for MEA. "This is a historic partnership that opens a range of quality theological study opportunities for Hispanic leaders in the United States and Spanish-speaking countries. The Hispanic Mennonite church is growing. We want these congregations to have well-trained disciples of Jesus to lead them."

### NEW IBA STUDY CENTER, VIRTUAL CENTERS

MEA's Anabaptist Bible Institute (IBA – Instituto Bíblico Anabautista) is marking **35 years** of serving the Hispanic Mennonite Church. Since 1988, IBA study centers have been planted and are growing in local congregations across the country, offering biblical and theological education to train men and women for ministry within the church. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a blow to in-person programming, today IBA's study centers crisscross the country from New York to Miami, from Virginia to Iowa. Thanks to the lessons of the pandemic, IBA also has one hybrid center for in-person and remote study and is piloting a fully virtual center with students from Philadelphia and Miami. **IBA opened its 13th study** center this fall at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. This cohort of students includes six from College Mennonite Church and two from Prairie Street Mennonite Church in neighboring Elkhart. Spanishspeaking pastors from each church have committed to work as a team to tutor the students in weekly class sessions. For more information about IBA or to apply, visit www.mennoniteeducation.org/hispanic-ministries/ instituto-biblico-anabautista/.

3145 Benham Ave. Suite 2, Elkhart, IN 46517 · 574.343.1310 · www.MennoniteEducation.org

#### MEET THE MEA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



We welcomed new members to the Board in July. The current Board includes (from top left): **Nathan Alleman**, of Waco, Texas, continuing as Board Chair; **Rose Bender Cook**, pastor of Whitehall (Pa.) Mennonite Church, Secretary; **Jessica Clopton-Robinson** from College Hill Mennonite Church in Tampa, Fla., Treasurer and Chair of the Audit Committee; **Erick Martinez** from Dallas, Texas, a member of Monte Horeb Iglesia; (from bottom left)



Judy Mullet, Harrisonburg, Va., and Lindale Mennonite Church, Vice-Chair; and Conrad Swartzentruber, Dock Mennonite Academy Superintendent, ex officio as

the Chair of the Mennonite Schools Council (preK – grade 12 schools). We are excited about new energy and fresh perspectives. We began a time of strategic planning at our fall meeting and will continue this work into 2024.

### "AT HOME" RESOURCES



The At Home series accompanies individuals and families through the days and weeks of Lent and Advent with the goal of deepening their experience of the season. Daily and weekly scriptures are woven with

worship rituals, prayers, activities, and background information. The 2023 edition of **Advent at Home, "How will we know?"** was released in mid-November and is available for free download in English and Spanish at MEA's website: <u>www.mennoniteeducation.org/resources</u>. Several alumni of Mennonite schools were involved in writing and designing this beautiful resource. Going forward, MEA plans to offer the At Home series in more languages and expand to develop more faith formation at home resources. Whether at home or in the classroom, MEA is committed to equipping teachers and parents as they impact children and young people.

### **BUILDING FAITH**

MEA is an underwriter of the Mennonite Early Childhood Network, which operates <u>Building Faith</u>, a website ministry for parents of young children. The goal is to provide **resources for families** who want to nurture their children's spiritual growth. The ministry develops new concepts every month with Scripture-based lessons in English and Spanish.

### Mennonite Public Educators

A public school teacher visited the MEA booth at MennoCon23 this

summer and lamented the lack of support for Mennonites who work in public education. She named some of the unique challenges Mennonites face, e.g., what to do about the Pledge of Allegiance and how to (whether to) be a peace witness. This conversation led to the formation of **Mennonite Public Educators** and a virtual gathering in October. It was facilitated by a core group of teachers and attended by around 17 people. The theme was "Being a Mennonite in public ed." Three more virtual gatherings are planned in 2024. **The next meeting on Jan. 25 will focus on "CRT, Social-Emotional Learning, and book banning."** MEA is helping to promote the group and broaden its reach. We have heard strong affirmation and want to explore how MEA can expand our support for the many Mennonites who work in public school settings.

### ANABAPTIST COMMUNICATORS

MEA staff serve on the Board of Directors of **Anabaptist Communicators,** an association of communications professionals with an Anabaptist connection. The group offers professional development, fellowship, and support. They recently hosted their annual conference online with workshops, keynotes, and affinity group meetings, as well as regional in-person gatherings. Regular affinity group meetings are offered virtually throughout the year along with "Talking Heads" seminars featuring experts on critical issues in the field. We encourage all media, marketing, and design professionals with an Anabaptist connection to consider joining! More information is available at <u>www.anabaptistcomm.org/</u>.

### MEA INVESTMENT FUND

Since 1995, MEA has partnered with various schools, congregations, conferences, and others within Mennonite Church USA for the management and investment of certain endowment funds, scholarship funds, and other financial assets owned by the institutions. These funds are integrated into an investment pool to improve efficiency and access to investment vehicles not otherwise available to them due to minimum investment requirements. Today, over 20 entities participate in the pool. As of Sept. 30, 2023, the Fund was valued at \$186.9 million. For more information visit MEA Investment Fund, LLC.

### On behalf of the staff and board of directors, thank you for supporting Anabaptist Mennonite education.

Submitted by Michael Danner Executive Director

### Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

# Report to the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

AMBS serves the church as a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world.

Our programs integrate academics, spiritual formation and practice. Join us — in person or at a distance, full time or part time — and deepen your understanding of Scripture, faith and Anabaptist theology!

**Degrees and programs** (\* = distance-friendly program)

- Master of Divinity\*
- Master of Arts in Christian Formation
- Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies
- Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism\*
- Doctor of Ministry in Leadership\*
- Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction\*
- Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies\* (fully customizable)
- Mennonite Education Agency Hispanic Ministries AMBS Graduate Certificate in Theology (in Spanish)
- Journey Missional Leadership Development Program\* (undergraduate-level, nondegree)

### ambs.edu/degrees-and-programs

We offer generous need-based financial aid, scholarships and matching grants for both full- and part-time graduate students. You *can* afford seminary! **ambs.edu/affordability** 

### Leadership and enrichment

Grow your ministry skills and gain Anabaptist approaches to today's leadership challenges through our nondegree offerings. (\* = distance-friendly program)

### Short-term options

- New! Practical Leadership Training modules\*
- Online Short Courses\*: four or six weeks, discussionbased, noncredit (no grades, no papers!)
- Invite AMBS\*: request a speaker (in person or online)
- Pastors & Leaders annual conference\*

### Yearlong offerings

- Spiritual Direction Seminars\*
- Transition to Leadership: program for new pastors
- Integrity Circles\*: reflect theologically on leadership within a group

### ambs.edu/leadership-and-enrichment



(*Above*) In April 2023, 12 men and eight women from five countries — Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, the United States and Zimbabwe — graduated from AMBS. Ten graduates completed part or all of their seminary studies at a distance.

### **Ohio Conference connections**

- Master of Divinity students: Matthew Peterson (Midway); Sue Short (Zion)
- Mennonite Education Agency Hispanic Ministries - AMBS Graduate Certificate in Theology student: Haroldo Martins Nunes (Sonnenberg)
- Journey participants/mentors: Jason Pauley/ Ron Wenzel (Trenton); Keith Lyndaker Schlabach (Millersburg)/Doug Zehr (Oak Grove); Alysa Short (Central)/Sue Short (Zion); Rebecca Kauffman (mentor) (Bethel)

### Want to try out seminary?

- Sign up for an Online Short Course:
  - Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible
  - Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology
  - Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture
  - Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication
  - Biblical Interpretation Across the Two Testaments
  - Resisting Christian Nationalism with the Gospel of Peace

### ambs.edu/online-short-courses

- Take a graduate-level course online or on campus. Nonadmitted students get 50% off tuition for their first three credit hours! **ambs.edu/upcoming-courses**
- Schedule a virtual or in-person visit and learn what AMBS has to offer! **ambs.edu/visit**
- Stay connected: facebook.com/followAMBS twitter.com/ambs\_seminary • ambs.edu/subscribe

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### Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

This year's Journey program includes seventeen participants and sixteen mentors in our Englishlanguage program and 21 participants and 8 mentors in our Journey Southeast Asia program. Three participants and their mentors are from Ohio Conference: **Alysa Short** (Wauseon, Central Mennonite) and mentor **Sue Short** (Archbold, Zion Mennonite); **Jason Pauley** (Hamilton, Trenton Mennonite) and mentor **Ron Wenzel** (Hamilton, Trenton Mennonite); and **Keith Lyndaker Schlabach** (Millersburg, Millersburg Mennonite) and mentor **Doug Zehr** (Smithville, Oak Grove Mennonite).

All Journey students and mentors gathered at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Michigan, for the fall Weekend Learning Event. Worship sessions laid the foundation for our time together and took place four times throughout the weekend. Learning sessions focused on spiritual disciplines and character formation for ministry; developing personal timelines, including significant points of spiritual and vocational growth (led by **Conference Minister Dick Barrett**); personality inventories; and exploring spiritual direction. Mentors participated in a mentoring workshop and mentors and mentees met together to develop and update their learning covenants, which help to guide them through the program.

Following the fall gathering, in mid-September, participants joined online missional leadership development classes. As part of these studies, they also carried out a wide variety of ministry assignments in their congregations and communities. Throughout the session, they also met with their mentors, typically bi-weekly, to discuss their classes and ministry experiences. In February, participants will join new online classes and continue to meet bi-weekly in mentor-mentee pairs.

The winter Weekend Learning Event will be held on the AMBS campus January 26-28, 2024, with the theme, Leadership for God's Reconciling Mission. The weekend will also include worship sessions, mentor and mentee workshops, and work on learning covenants. During the Sunday morning worship time, mentees in their final year of the program, including Alysa Short, will share a reflection, and their conference minister will provide a blessing and prayer.

Twice a year, mentees submit short reflection papers describing their learnings from the previous online class, and mentors submit reflections describing their observations of their mentees' learning and growth. These reflection papers are shared with mentees' conference ministers to help conference ministers stay informed of mentees' growth and development in the program.

The Journey Board plays a vital role in shaping and guiding the program. Many thanks to **Dick Barrett, Doug King**, representative of the Credentialing Ministry Team, and **Dan Miller**, Interim Conference Minister, for serving on the Journey Board.

Journey participants and alumni frequently tell us that Journey is a tremendous learning opportunity for pastors, lay leaders, church planters, and other emerging leaders! If you or someone you know wants to develop or deepen their ministry gifts or is exploring a call to ministry, please speak to Dan Miller about whether the Journey program might be the right next step.

Respectfully submitted,

Junel Dingerich Jongenichen

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker Dean of Lifelong Learning

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary 3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517, USA • 574.295.3726 • ambs.edu



### NEW GRADUATE PROGRAMS

In addition to long-standing graduate programs in business and education, classes are now underway for Bluffton's Master of Social Work (MSW) and Master of Nutrition and Dietetics (MND) degrees. The online MSW program is being offered in partnership with Goshen College and features a mental health specialization. **Laurel Neufeld Weaver '83**, is serving as assistant professor of social work and field director for the program.

The MND program was established ahead of a January 2024 change in Registered Dietitian Nutritionist licensing requirements. Students are now required to have a master's degree and at least 1,000 hours of supervised experiential learning to sit for the RDN licensing examination. Bluffton's new program fulfills both requirements.

### **OSU ENGINEERING PARTNERSHIP**

A new partnership between Bluffton University and Ohio State Lima establishes a pathway for incoming students to study engineering using the resources of both universities. Beginning in fall 2024, students will be able to live four years on Bluffton's campus and fully participate in athletics and student clubs/organizations while earning two degrees. Successful students will graduate with both a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Engineering Science from Bluffton and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology from Ohio State. Students will take a mix of classes from both universities.

### THE LION AND LAMB PEACE ARTS CENTER

During the spring 2023 semester, **Tareq Abuhalima**, graduate assistant at The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center, along with 10 Bluffton University students developed "Teaching Peace to Children." The sessions focus on issues such as conflict resolution and cultural understanding. Students are currently presenting the sessions to area elementary school students. Abuhalima co-directs the center with **Dr. Paul Neufeld Weaver**, professor of education and director of global education. A native of Gaza, Palestine, Abuhalima is pursuing his MAOM graduate degree at Bluffton. He is connected with MennoPin (Mennonite Palestinian Israel Network), and shared "Experiences in the Gaza Strip" during a January Forum. Other events hosted by The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center include an improv workshop led by **Andrea-Flack Wetherald '10**, Brave Conversations leader, and prayer vigils concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### SPIRITUAL LIFE WEEK

Each semester, Bluffton University holds Spiritual Life Week. During the fall 2023 event, **David Glick '07** shared the Chapel and Forum messages as students explored John 15:5 and the theme "Be Rooted." Spring semester's Spiritual Life Week will be held the week of March 17 with **Lindsay Horn '19** collaborating with students on the theme, "Even when we are not...God is."

### 2024 Report to Ohio Conference

### Thank you!

Bluffton University currently enrolls seven students from Ohio Conference Churches: Danielle King and Megan King, Tedrow Mennonite Church; Rachel Larson, Oak Grove Mennonite Church (West Liberty); Kinsey Myers and Heather Sauder, West Clinton Mennonite Church; Dylan Woods, Berlin Mennonite Church; and Elijah Zimmerman, Zion Mennonite Church.

Church Matching Scholarship support is \$32,202 for 2023-24.

The Bluffton trustee from Ohio Conference is **Alysa Short '02**.

### Save the date Keeney Peace Lecture

11 a.m. Tuesday, March 26 "So We and Our Children May Live"

Sarah Augustine, co-founder and executive director, Coalition for Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery, will discuss her book, "So We and Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis," co-written with Bluffton alumna Sheri Hostetler '84.

Find us on the web and social media! www.bluffton.edu

For more information, contact Gerald Mast Church relations coordinator and professor of communication mastg@bluffton.edu



Preparing mature leaders to minister together in a global context

### SPRING 2024

### **OHIO MENNONITE CONFERENCE**

### SEMINARY ANNUAL REPORT

### Graduate Certificate in Faith-Based Peacebuilding Launches

"What peacebuilding is, to me, has to be and is undergirded by my faith," affirmed Keren Kandel, one of the first three graduates of EMS's new certificate program. She described how she both learned about principles *and* put them into practice in community. Students in the 18-credit program take courses on campus or online, with flexibility built into the degree so students can choose relevant courses in theology, biblical studies, racial justice, conflict analysis and peacebuilding.

### **EMS Celebrates 2023 Graduates**

On May 7, EMS celebrated its largest graduating class since before the pandemic in 2019. Nineteen graduates earned master's degrees in Christian leadership, divinity, and religion; and certificates in Christian studies, general theology, and faith-based peacebuilding. 2022-23 seminary enrollment was strong, with a 14% increase over the previous year.



Seminary graduates receive a blessing at EMU commencement

### **Conflict Transformation Trainings Equip Ministry Leaders**

The first series of workshops in conflict transformation, trauma resilience, and adaptive leadership were held in the spring 2023. Director Dr. Jacob Cook works with leaders at EMS and EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding to equip pastors and lay leaders through digital content, online courses, regional on-site



Participants learn trauma-aware practices in May 20 workshop

trainings and on-campus workshops. Utilizing a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., EMS is developing these interdisciplinary leadership workshops and trainings that integrate personal spiritual formation, biblical and theological frameworks, and conflict transformation skills. More offerings are forthcoming, and custom-designed trainings are available on EMU's campus or at your location.

### EMS Averages 82.5% Tuition Scholarships for 2023 Admits

Students admitted to EMS master's programs in 2023 were awarded, on average, scholarships covering 82.5% of their tuition. Thanks to generous donors, applicants can receive up to 100% tuition scholarships on the basis of merit and financial need. Plus, now that all EMS courses are available virtually, EMS is seeing an increase in attendance from students outside of Virginia and beyond the U.S. EMS's Zoom technology and online learning management system make our synchronous learning dynamic and formative. Apply now or recommend EMS to someone you know! Visit emu/seminary/admissions/grad

### Harrisonburg, Virginia

www.emu.edu 51

### Statement of Purpose

Eastern Mennonite Seminary prepares servants of Christ to *minister together locally* and globally. In response to God's gracious call, we invite students to embody and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God's Spirit as wise interpreters, mature practitioners, discerning communicators, and transformational leaders.

- Susan Schultz Huxman, president
- Daniel Ott, seminary dean
- Sarah Ann Bixler, associate dean

emu.edu/seminary 540-432-4260

### Conflict Transformation and Trauma Resilience Workshops

Equipping pastors and lay leaders on campus and online

emu.edu/seminary/ workshops

### churchrelations@emu.edu



*EMU prepares students to serve and lead in a global context* 

### **SPRING 2024**

### **OHIO MENNONITE CONFERENCE**

### **EMU ANNUAL REPORT**

### Greetings to our friends from President Huxman at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU)!

We are thankful for your support in prayer, advocacy, financial gifts, and sending us students who are fulfilling their call in all our educational programming. We are fortunate to have an impactful contingent of support from churches, agencies and visionary individuals as represented by our current students, loyal alumni, trustees, faculty and staff who call communities within this conference their home.

The 2023-2024 academic year has given us much, for which we are grateful. Highlights from this year are many, including:

- We have expanded programming and student access in our seminary (EMS) and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) thanks to donor support and major Lily Foundation grants. These combined efforts allow us to hire instructors and advisors, make it easier and more affordable for students, and to launch new programming, such as the continuing education program, Shalom Academy, in early January.
- We have launched our first ever comprehensive philanthropic campaign: "Forward Together, 2023-2028" after a third-party feasibility study indicated that a reservoir of goodwill from our loyal supporters would support a \$40M campaign with joy. This will be our largest campaign for people, programs and facilities.
- We have celebrated a new women's networking and philanthropic group: "<u>Royal</u> <u>Women for EMU</u>." At the inaugural kick off, we honored 18 pioneering women from EMS, EMC, and EMU as part of a larger initiative to support diversity, equity and inclusion at EMU.
- The PBS Viewpoint Series with Dennis Quaid has been so impressed with our diversity, equity and inclusion work that they came to record a documentary on our campus in October.

As highlighted in our new strategic plan, "Pathways of Promise," this is our moment to position EMU as a premier faith-inspired peace and justice university (see our "<u>Reaffirmation of EMU as a Peace and Justice University</u>" on the context of the Palestine-Israel atrocities.)

This is our challenge: to make a radical difference in educating more "bridgebuilders" in our world today.

Psalm 119 gives us direction in navigating our polarizing times: "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*" Our mission sets forth the ultimate "pathway of promise"— to follow Jesus, a pathway of enduring light well-marked as a lamp onto our feet.

In gratitude,

Susan Schultz Huxman, Ph.D. President, EMU

### Harrisonburg, Virginia

www.emu.edu

How can EMU serve you?

Contact the church relations office to schedule the president or a faculty guest speaker: 540-432-4200 or *ChurchRelations@emu.edu* 

### Ohio Conference Connections to EMU

### Undergraduate Studnts

Spring semester 2024 has twenty undergraduate students and one graduate enrolled from Ohio Mennonite Conference.

### Giving

Ohio Mennonite Conference churches gave \$2,500 to the Seminary Annual Fund and \$46,400 in matching church grants to their students during the year ending June 2023.

- Susan Schultz Huxman, president
- Kirk Shisler, vice president for advancement
- Braydon Hoover, associate vice president of advancement
- Mary Jensen, vice president for enrollment and strategic growth
- Luke Litwiller, director of undergrad admissions

### **Our Vision**

We will open new pathways of access and achievement for all students who aspire to grow as unifying leaders equipped with intercultural competence, oriented toward peace and justice, and rooted in an active faith modeled on the life and teachings of Jesus.

churchrelations@emu.edu

### GOSHENCOLLEGE

# 2023-24 Report to Ohio Mennonite Conference

### MISSION

Goshen College transforms local and global communities through courageous, creative and compassionate leaders. Shaped by Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, we integrate academic excellence and real-world experience with active love for God and neighbor.

### VISION

Goshen College will cultivate joy, growth and purpose, preparing students to thrive in life, leadership and service. Rooted in the way of Jesus, we will seek inclusive community and transformative justice in all that we do.



**Rebecca J. Stoltzfus '83** President

president@goshen.edu

 Read the president's blog at: goshen.edu/president-blog



Dan Koop Liechty '88 Director of alumni engagement & international student adviser alumni@goshen.edu



### Jen Shenk '94 Campus pastor

jshenk@goshen.edu

 Watch past campus chapels and convocations: goshen.edu/podcasts

### **FEATURED LINKS**

Campus News goshen.edu/news

Campus Events goshen.edu/calendar

Music Center Events gcmusiccenter.org/events

Athletics Events goleafs.net/calendar

Study-Service Term Blogs goshen.edu/sst

### CAMPUS NEWS

### Our 2023-24 Campus Ministries theme — Walking Together: Praying, Serving and Loving

At Goshen College, we have the gift of a diverse student population. Although our faith journeys are as unique as each individual, we all share the need for belonging, love, community and meaning. In a world that is polarized and divided, we commit to walking together, seeing one another as companions on the way, trusting that God is our guide on the journey.

### Westlawn Hall renovations

This renovation will allow Goshen College to grow its nursing and public health programs in state-of-the-art learning spaces, as well as provide enhanced dining services and indoor and outdoor gathering spaces that serve the entire campus. Renovations are expected to be completed by early 2025.

Project details, plans and updates can be found at **goshen.edu/westlawn.** 

### New GC history book published

A new Goshen College history, "A Mennonite College for Everyone(?): Goshen College and the Quest for Identity and Inclusion, 1960-2020," by John D. Roth, a noted Anabaptist-Mennonite scholar and professor emeritus of history at Goshen College, vividly describes the transformation of a faith-based, liberal arts college as it has wrestled with questions of identity and inclusion in a context of rapid social and culture change.

Learn more at goshen.edu/historybook



## \$43,600

Amount Ohio Mennonite Conference churches gave for students for the 2022-23 school year. The Goshen College Church Aid Matching Grant program provides a dollar-for-dollar match of the first \$1,000 per student and a 1:4 match after that, up to full tuition.



### 2024 Ohio Mennonite Conference Report





#### Why Hesston College

For Kalia Baker, Hesston College was a family tradition she didn't think she would follow. Thankfully, the Hesston Experience is now proving to be everything her parents said it would be and more. While the decision to come from Oregon to Kansas was an adjustment, it was made easier being a part of the close-knit community on campus and quickly being able to find her people. Kalia came to play volleyball and major in education but has been involved in much more on campus, including captain for the flag football team and going to Campus Activities Board events. She is very grateful the professors know each student and want to see them achieve their goals both in the classroom and in all other areas of life. While Hesston might be a family tradition, she is glad she now has a place in it.

### Bible Department & Everence Revitalize Weekend College

Professors Nick Ladd and Michele Hershberger are in conversation with Everence regarding a partnership to bring new weekend college events. They are working together to hold conferences for pastors and church leaders on the topics of burn-out and polarization. Nick and Michele will give input on these topics: causes and remedies for pastoral burn-out, a biblical understanding of unity and leading conflictual groups toward healthy conversations. One conference will be held in Colorado Springs, Colo., for the Mountain States Conference. They are in the works to plan a second conference with more details to come.

#### Nursing Club presents sizable donations to New Hope Shelter

After a semester of fundraising during the spring of 2023, the Hesston College Nursing Club presented two large donations to New Hope Shelter in Newton. The first donation consisted of clothes, food, hygiene supplies and a variety of other items that filled four cars, and the second donation was a \$1,000 check presented to shelter executive director Brian Bisbee. Bisbee says he was aware of the nursing club's fundraising efforts, and was pleasantly surprised by the donations received. "We were very encouraged by the number of donated items and we were most impressed with the quality and attitude of the nursing program students. They were so willing to help and showed their care," he says. "We are supported by the community with no government tax dollars--and they showed themselves to be part of that community."

### Title IX Update

Hesston College will continue to work with external counsel Cozen O'Connor to implement the recommendations from their report on campus policies and practices related to student safety and Title IX. The Title IX Implementation Group is formed and meeting weekly as of summer 2023 to begin addressing the recommendations. Progress made by this group will be posted to hesston.edu as updates are available.

### FROM THE NEST

- News
- hesston.edu/news Calendar of Events
- hesston.edu/calendar
- > Performing Arts
- hesston.edu/performing-arts-calendar > Athletics
- HClarks.com



The 2023 and 2024 nursing club presidents present a \$1,000 check to New Hope Shelter.



<sup>18</sup>The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, <sup>19</sup>to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

#### LUKE 4:18-19, NRSV





### 2024 Report to Ohio Mennonite Conference

Submitted by Karen Lehman, President/CEO

### **MHS Association Vision**

MHS Association is the go-to leader for integrating faith and work in health and human services.

### **MHS Association Mission**

Anchored in Anabaptist values, MHS Association inspires and strengthens health and human service ministries to fulfill their missions.

The following Ohio organizations belong to our network of 79 ministries:

- Adriel (West Liberty)
- Edgewater Place a Greencroft Community (Plain City)
- Fairlawn Retirement Community (Archbold)
- Harmony Village (Columbiana)
- Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio (Bluffton)
- OrrVilla Retirement Community (Orrville)
- Shalom Ministries (Archbold)
- SpringHaven Inc. (Mt. Eaton and Rittman)
- Sunshine Communities (Maumee)
- Walnut Hills a Greencroft Community (Walnut Creek)

### Activities

- The 2024 MHS Assembly will be held March 12 14 in Savannah, GA. Registration will begin on December 19, 2023. For more information and to register <u>visit our website</u>.
- MHS Association provides monthly webinars on a variety of governance, workforce development, leadership, and faith and work topics. These webinars are free and open to anyone who is interested. Registration for upcoming webinars can be accessed <u>via our</u> <u>website</u>.
- MHS Association members continue to appreciate tools and resources to support their ministries. <u>Visit our website</u> for more information on our member services.
- <u>MHS Consulting</u> continues to serve MHS Association members and nonmembers in the health and human services sector; primarily providing resources in governance, executive searches, executive coaching, interim placement, strategic planning and positioning, and operational, financial, and market assessments.
- The MHS Association Board of Directors and MHS Association Staff continue to advance diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion initiatives. Read <u>Confessions from our Journey</u> <u>Toward Belonging Rooted in Justice</u>, written by MHS Association COO, Clare Krabill, to learn more about our JEDI journey thus far.

MHS Association asks for continued prayer for staffing retention and recruitment for MHS Association member organizations that are facing these challenges. We also request prayer for the vulnerable population served by our member organizations and their employees as we enter another winter flu and COVID-19 season. Finally, please pray for the wisdom and discernment of the leadership teams of these critical organizations as they navigate the many challenges of non-profits. We are grateful for the financial gifts, gifts in kind, prayer, and volunteer support given to MHS Association member organizations.





SHINE Leader salt&light REJOICE! VOICES



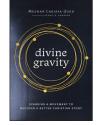
### Report to Ohio Conference

#### Spring 2024

At MennoMedia we publish curricula and books that call readers to follow Jesus in word and deed. We publish resources about Christian discipleship, spirituality, reconciliation, justice, and theology from an Anabaptist perspective. Our curricula, periodicals, and hymnals reach a broad spectrum of evangelical, mainline, and Anabaptist readers and congregations, cultivating passion for faith formation and an active life of discipleship.

### NEW RESOURCES FOR THE ENTIRE CHURCH, FROM HERALD PRESS

#### **Divine Gravity**



Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story

Meghan Larissa Good invites readers into a movement that is finding ways to tell a better Christian story. Readers will rediscover what an authentic, Jesus-centered Christianity looks like and how, through Christ, God is breathing new life among us, restoring creation, and reconciling all divided things. In this better story, isolation, intolerance, polarization, and death have no grip.

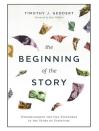


### The New Anabaptists

Practices for Emerging Communities

What does it look like to be an Anabaptist community in the modern world? In this companion to *The Naked Anabaptist*, author Stuart Murray identifies 12 common practices of churches and communities that are shaped by an Anabaptist vision. He explores how these practices might shape emerging Christian communities and inspire those seeking fresh expressions as cultural changes accelerate.





#### **So We and Our Children May Live** Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis

Everywhere we look, we see signs that all is not right with our earth. Ecological justice requires challenging our assumptions about creation and our relationship to it. It requires decolonization. Authors Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler offer hope for a better future alongside concrete actions for joining with Indigenous Peoples to protect life and negotiate with decision-makers for sustainable change in the way of Jesus.

The Beginning of the Story Understanding the Old Testament in the Story of Scripture

Although the Bible contains 66 books, most Christians turn first—and perhaps only—to the New Testament. Author Tim Geddert says that to understand the Bible—the grand story of God's dealings with humanity, of God's relationship to the whole universe—we must learn to read the first three-quarters of Scripture as Jesus did, and as the New Testament teaches us to do.





### NEW FOR SUMMER: PATH TO PEACE CURRICULUM FROM SHINE

Shine's new *Path to Peace* summer curriculum allows teachers and children to follow the peace paths in *The Peace Table* storybook Bible. The curriculum includes faith formation materials for PreK–Kindergarten and Elementary age levels.

For 2024, the unit is built around the "Peace with Creation" peace path from *The Peace Table* and includes three 5-session modules. Each session includes songs, prayers, instructions for telling the Bible story, wondering questions, activities, and media connections. Churches will need a copy of *The Peace Table* for each classroom.





#### New for Families: "Follow the Peace Path" Cards

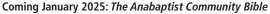
Extend learning and bring the Bible story home with a deck of "Peace with Creation" cards. Each of the 52 cards in the deck comes packed with ideas for families to do at home together. Whether a church has summer Sunday school or not, these cards are a great way to stay connected with families and provide parents and caregivers with an easy and fun faith formation resource. Purchase one deck of cards for each family.

### Learn more at ShineCurriculum.com.

MennoMedia. PO Box 866, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. 800-245-7894. www.MennoMedia.org

### ANABAPTISM AT 500: LOOKING BACK, LIVING FORWARD

The 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in 2025 gives the church a unique opportunity to celebrate the Spirit's calling together of diverse people across all boundaries of culture and geography. MennoMedia's vision is to lead the way in helping North American Anabaptist Christians experience spiritual renewal by creating fresh, forward-looking resources for Anabaptism's quincentenary celebration.



Embark on a transformative journey with the *Anabaptist Community Bible*. Immerse yourself in the teachings of Scripture, seamlessly interwoven with the rich tapestry of the Anabaptist movement. Expertly designed using the Common English Bible translation, this edition connects you more deeply to the biblical story, the Anabaptist story, and your own story. Experience a renewed engagement with Scripture as you engage the text in conversation with a larger community of believers, expecting God's Word to transform your life. Accessible to Christians from all faith traditions who want to read Scripture through a Jesus-centered lens. The *Anabaptist Community Bible* will be







### Key features of all editions: • The text of the Common English Bible (CEB)

- Single-column format for the biblical text, with over 7,200 marginal notes
- Biblical book introductions written by Anabaptist pastors, leaders, and scholars provide context and guidance
- Biblical Context notes from Anabaptist pastors,
- leaders, and scholarsCommunity Reflection notes from nearly
- 600 Bible study groups
  Early Anabaptist Witness notes offer insights into how early Anabaptists engaged the Bible
- 40 original linocut illustrations of the biblical story
- Informative essays on Anabaptist hermeneutics, the
- Apocrypha, and other topics useful for group discussion • A 365-day Bible reading plan and suggestions for group Bible study
- Durable Smyth-sewn lay-flat binding
- Presentation page for gift-giving
- 2-color interior
- Full-color Oxford maps
- 10-point font size

Learn more about other products marking this anniversary at AnabaptismAt500.com.



2023 has been full of exciting work and meaningful connections as the work of Mennonite Men continues to benefit our communities and congregations. Our three programs-JoinTrees, JoinMen, and JoinHands-continue to thrive as we invite men to grow, give and serve as followers of Jesus for God's shalom.

To learn more about our work, download resources, or contribute to our programs, visit mennonitemen.org.

Steve Thomas, Mennonite Men U.S. Coordinator stevet@mennonitemen.org | (574) 202-0048

Don Neufeld, Mennonite Men Coordinator for Canada don.neufeld@outlook.com | 905-650-157

### JoinTrees

### Planting trees to restore the earth

by 2030. This campaign targets climate change—an existential threat to life on our planet. By increasing tree and forest cover with this JoinTrees campaign, our goals are to help: (1) mitigate global warming, (2) serve climate justice, and (3) support vulnerable

The largest project we funded this year was members were extensively involved in planting and caring for these trees. In this project, 14,104

Planting trees to restore the earth JoinTrees is our campaign to plant one million trees and 375 were fruit trees for a total of 34,248 trees. be agroforestry projects in communities in Latin America and Africa. These agroforestry plantings not only sequester CO2 and help cool the planet but also help restore degraded land, protect intact communities impacted by climate changes.

To fund these projects, we need \$145,830. Once these projects are funded and completed, our total tree count will be 333,610—one third the way toward our goal of 1 million trees!



### **JoinHands**

Sharing resources for new church buildings

JoinHands is our program for giving and grantmaking. Through our JoinHands Mennonite Church Building Program, we provide grants to help new congregations acquire their first church building. Mennonite Men has given over 2.3 million dollars to new congregations for this purpose.

We invite individuals and congregations to give to JoinHands. We especially ask churches pursuing building projects to give as a way of sharing resources and serving "fair balance" with congregations in need.

Our recent JoinHands grants assisted with church

projects in Burkina Faso and Columbia. One went to Íglesia Menonita Caminando En Esperanza in Bogota, Colombia. The other went to Kodeni Evangelical Mennonite Church in Kodeni, Burkina Faso. In this predominately Muslim context, Muslim youth helped with construction—illustrating Christians and Muslims living together in community.

Our board recently approved a JoinHands grant to assist the Omaha Chin Christian Church (Central Plains Conference) with purchasing a used church building. This congregation is connected to a large population of Chin immigrants in Omaha and has a special ministry of assisting people navigate a challenging new life in North America and find a home in the Anabaptist family. We now need to raise funds to make this \$40,000 grant.



### JoinMen

Gathering men and promoting their growth

JoinMen provides gatherings and resources from an Anabaptist perspective to promote healthy masculinity, Christian formation and community. We desire that all men find a place of belonging among men who are strong, loving and wise as we follow Jesus in building God's shalom.

Gatherings provide opportunities for men to join together and engage issues in community. More than an event, these experiences are also meant to encourage participants to be part of an ongoing men's group and growth process. A full list of gathering themes we offer can be found at

#### mennonitemen.org/joinmen.

We receive encouraging reports of individuals and groups using our new book *Living that Matters* (Herald Press, 2023). Here's a response from Chicago: "At Reba Place Church in Evanston, Illinois, a group of men gather once a month to encourage and pray for one another. At the core of our gatherings is the invaluable resource Living that Matters: Honest Conversations for Men of Faith. Many of us have a tendency to isolate and disengage, but the book has helped our group grow closer together because of the wisdom that draws us in every time.'

We've led several gatherings based on our book and invite your congregation to host one in your community

Engaging men to grow, give and serve as followers of Jesus for God's shalom



Mennonite

Engaging men to grow, give and serve.

Men





# Be local. Be global. Be the Gospel.

Note: Underlined words indicate active links.



### Worker support around the world

### Global Mission Partnership — **Argentine Chaco**

### » Sonnenberg Mennonite Church

Global Mission Partnership — Mongolia

### » Berlin Mennonite Church

### Worker support

Delicia Bravo Aguilar and Peter Wigginton, serving in Quito, Ecuador

#### » Central Mennonite Church » Trenton Mennonite Church

Couple serving in a sensitive

location in Central Asia » Beech Mennonite Church

#### Mission worker serving in a sensitive location in Central Asia » Wooster Mennonite Church

#### Matthew and Toni Krabill, serving in Accra, Ghana

- » Crown Hill Mennonite Church
- » Salem Mennonite Church, Elida » Salem Mennonite Church, Kidron
  - Sharon Mennonite Church
- » Toledo Mennonite Church
- » Zion Mennonite Church

### 5 Kate Widmer, serving in

### Montbéliard, France

» Oak Grove Mennonite Church, West Liberty

### Prayer partners

### Service participants

Mennonite Voluntary Service Jake Myers, serving in Alamosa, Colorado

#### Service Adventure 7 Melanie Wenger, served in

Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 2022-2023

### SOOP

Dottie and Mel Hathaway, Glendale, Arizona

LouAnn and David Kanagy, Glendale, Arizona

### Jennifer and Adam Cobb, Lincoln

City, Oregon Jim and Linda Rufenacht, Tucson, Arizona

Jane and Marion Beyeler, San Antonio, Texas

Andy and Anita Stoner, Glendale, Arizona

Jeff and Kelsey Hochstetler, Colombia

### Youth Venture

Shyan Strader, served in Benin

### <u>Congregational giving to Mission Network</u>

During Mission Network's past fiscal year, Aug. 1, 2022, through July 31, 2023, Ohio Conference congregations gave \$266,492. Thank you!



On behalf of all of us at Mennonite Mission Network, thank you Ohio Conference for your commitment of support! Your prayers, contributions and participation in our programs is a vital part of our partnerships with congregations, organizations, and individuals around the world. Like 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, each of us uses our gifts for the good of one another, and we

can trust that our service and love for others is guided and strengthened by God.

Blessings to you!

Marisa Smucker

Marisa Smucker, Interim Executive Director



Thank you so much for the partnership you provide through your prayers, contributions, and participation. May you be blessed in your ministries across the

street and around the globe.!

### Eric Frey Mortin

Eric Frey Martin Interim Director of Constituent Engagement

Thank you for your continued partnership in God's mission!

www.MennoniteMission.net Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872



# Mennonite Women 🐼 USA program report • january 2024

# International Women's Fund annual scholarships

The IWF scholarship fund helps women around the world recieve training for church leadership and makes a way for supporting women scholars by preserving 100% of designated donations for awards. In 2024 we are giving 37 women in Angola, Sierra Leone, Columbia, Brazil, Guatemala, and the US a total of \$12,700.

# Coffee + Conversation topical discussions

Recent discussions include: the film 'Women Talking,' LGBTQ+ stories of hope and resilience, bridging the generational gaps that divide us in life and death, and a Women's Christmas Examen. Reach out with your topic ideas for our monthly gathering via Zoom or request an in-person gathering in your region.

# Connections to Sisterhood communications channels

Every month MW USA distributes the Grapevine eNewsletter to regularly report updates and upcoming programs. We also send a quarterly print edition of the same information to our sisters who prefer to stay offline. For those on social media, we seek engagement on our Facebook and Instagram channels, and we always welcome ideas and impressions by phone or email to the office and via our Regional Representatives.

# Women Powered Media publications and a podcast

Hear from women about the concerns of life and faith about which we share and differ. Let their stories inspire you to share yours as well on MW USA's Women's Voices blog or upcoming podcast featuring real women in conversation about their realities. Each year we also publish a woman-authored Bible study guide around which many dozens of local womens' groups gather.

Sister Care self healing and caregiving curriculum

Sister Care seminars reach across the world with curriculum offered in a multi-day retreat format to give women opportunities for healing and sustainably supporting one another. In 2023 we served 122 women in Thailand, Laos and Chile.

Mennonite Women USA • 718 N. Main St. Newton, KS 67114 • 866.866.2872 • office@mwusa.org

www.mennonitewomenusa.org • @mennowomenusa







