

# OHIO MENNONITE EVANGEL

News & Views of Ohio Conference

JAN/FEB 2024



ohiomennoniteconference.org

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 2 MCC essay contest
- 3 ACA activities for non-delegates
- 4 Conference minister musings
- 5 Pastor-Spouse Retreat  
Ohio MCC Comforter Bash
- 6 Grace & Groundings  
Resource corner
- 7 Women in Leadership Retreat
- 8 Back page briefings

*Meghan Larissa Good to be featured presenter*

## Sharon Mennonite to host ACA

**Sharon Mennonite Church in Plain City will host the 2024 Annual Conference Assembly (ACA) March 1-2. The theme of this year's gathering will be "Following Jesus Together with a Common Mission," based on Philippians 2:5-11.**

The 2024 Annual Conference Assembly is intended for all members of Ohio Conference churches, not just delegates. In a letter to delegates, Conference Moderator Ken Sims wrote, "This year we will offer some **exciting**

**changes** as ACA will begin on Friday morning. This schedule will give us time to hear from our featured speaker, Meghan Larissa Good from Trinity Mennonite Church in Arizona. Meghan is the author of two books and will be sharing with us specifically on her newly published book, *Divine Gravity: Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story*.

"We are really excited to have Meghan play such a large role in the weekend. **Churches will want to**

Continued on page 3



## Please join us for the Winter Read

**Starting this month: The Ohio Conference Winter Read, a Conference-wide book group on Zoom, will be returning for the third year in a row.**

We would love to have you join us for conversation about the book *Not Quite Fine: Mental Health, Faith and Showing Up for One Another* by

Carlene Hill Byron. Discussion leaders will be Emiley Shenk and Darin Nissley.

Warren Kinghorn, MD, ThD, of the Duke University Medical Center and Duke Divinity



Continued on page 2

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## Winter Read

Continued from page 1

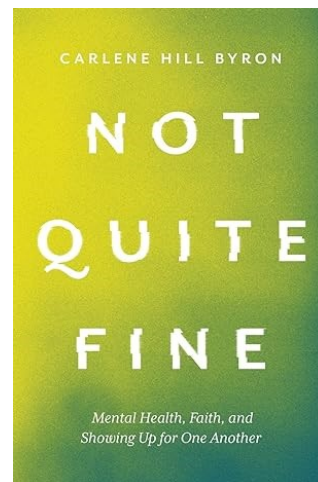
School, recommends *Not Quite Fine*, saying, "For those who care about mental illness and wonder how to help, this is a wonderful place to start."

Winter Read discussions will take place on Zoom on five Thursday evenings: Jan. 11, Jan. 18, Feb. 1, Feb. 8 and Feb. 15. Sessions will begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8 p.m. **If you are unable to participate in all five sessions, don't worry. Registrants will be**

**able to view recordings of sessions.**

Registration for the Ohio Conference Winter Read is free, but participants need to purchase their own copy of the book. It is available from the MennoMedia website: <https://bit.ly/NotQuiteFine> and from Amazon: <https://bit.ly/NotQuiteFineBook>. A reading schedule is available at <https://bit.ly/2024WRSchedule>.

To register, go to <https://bit.ly/>



[OhioConferenceEventRegistration.](#) ■

## MCC essay contest highlights youth perspectives

**The annual MCC U.S. National Peace & Justice Ministries essay contest** highlights the perspectives of youth on significant public policy issues. Are you a youth who attends a Mennonite high school or an Anabaptist

church? This contest is your opportunity to express your views in essay format on critical issues facing U.S. society. This year's topics are climate change, immigration, and mass incarceration. Submis-

sions are due Feb. 23, 2024, and may be in English or Spanish. The grand prize is \$1,000! Find out more about the high school essay contest: <https://bit.ly/2024MCCEssayContest>. ■

### Personnel of the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

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# Annual Conference Assembly

Continued from page 1

send as many people as possible, not just delegates, to ACA this year as Meghan's input will be beneficial for all as she leads us in finding ways to tell the Christian story and to reignite hope in Christ, recognizing that God is breathing life among us, restoring creation, and reconciling all divided things."

In addition to presentations by Meghan Larissa Good, ACA will include a prayer time on Saturday morning, worship services, delegate business sessions, and a group session for delegates

led by the Conference consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, which will be devoted to working on the Conference's strategic plan. Alternate activities will be available for non-delegates during the delegate sessions.

The registration fee for ACA is \$50 per person if received by Feb. 9. After that date, the registration fee will increase to \$65 per person. There is an additional charge for meals.

Registration forms and more information about ACA are available on the Ohio Conference website: <https://bit.ly/2024ACAInfo>. To register



Meghan Larissa Good, lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Phoenix, Arizona, will be the featured presenter at the 2024 ACA. To learn more about her, see <https://meghanlarissagood.com>.

online, go to <https://bit.ly/2024ACARegistration>. ■

## ACA to offer activities for non-delegates

While delegates are engaged in Conference work during the worshipful work sessions at ACA, non-delegates will have the option of participating in alternate activities.

Several options are available:

**Volunteering at Country Closet Thrift Shop**, the local MCC thrift store located around the corner from Sharon Mennonite. Volunteers are needed for a variety of services that may include light cleaning, bagging, sorting donations, stocking items, or other things.

**Volunteering at Daily Needs Assistance (DNA)**, a Christ-centered non-profit serving impoverished/low-income families in the greater Plain City area with holistic resources and programming. Their mission is to love their neighbors, act to alleviate pov-

erty, and walk with people towards Christ. DNA would appreciate help on Friday morning unloading trucks for their food pantry.

**Participating in one or more spiritual practices.**

Options include Lectio Divina (reading and reflecting on scripture), Visio Divina (reflecting on a sacred image), Praying in Color, and Prayers of Lament. Explanations of each spiritual practice will be provided for participants. ■

Read  
Meghan Larissa Good's



**BEFORE  
ACA**  
to be entered into a  
prize drawing at ACA!

Each registration to Annual Conference Assembly will receive a copy of *divine gravity*. Participants in Winter Cluster meetings may receive their copy at the meetings. Copies may be available prior to ACA in other ways.

Registration for ACA will be available the end of December at [ohiomennoniteconference.org](http://ohiomennoniteconference.org).

Where are you reading *divine gravity*?  
Post your picture  
on Ohio Conference's  
Facebook page.  
Use #OCdivinegravity.



## CONFERENCE MINISTER MUSINGS

# Living Out God's Greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission

By Dan Miller  
Interim Conference Minister

We wish you a Merry Christmas

We wish you a Merry Christmas

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

The Ohio Conference staff hopes you had a meaningful celebration of Christ's birth, and that you were able to be with people you love. We pray that you can begin 2024 grounded in God's love and God's gift of Jesus, in relationships with people you love, and in anticipation of meeting God this year.

I am glad to join you as you "live out God's Greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission." I began Dec. 1, and am pleased to be with you as interim conference minister as we begin 2024. I am already impressed with the work of Conference leadership teams to support congregations.

**You might be aware of Ohio Conference's two-year review process. Every human organization needs to review and realign its priorities and structures. 2024 will not be a lazy year for Ohio Conference! As**

**important decisions get made about finances and structure and staffing, the ultimate goal is to effectively "live out God's Greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission." Because really, the life of Conference is in the congregations.**

And congregations are challenged. How do we respond to aging congregations with shrinking resources? What are ways to navigate political, cultural and racial differences? How do we engage with the diverse people in our communities who seek spiritual vitality but not in the church? I think about these questions and wonder what God is up to. I struggle sometimes to speak about Jesus in ways that build bridges and invite conversation and exploration. So as Conference does this strategic work in the context of the last few years, wouldn't it be a shame to come out with only a reorganization? Wouldn't it be a shame if we didn't also grow as disciples?

This will not be a lazy year for Ohio Conference. As we head into 2024, I invite you to pray with me:

- To be grounded in God's love.



- For Ohio Conference churches to hold to Jesus, allowing him to turn our worlds upside down as he did for the first disciples and the early church.
- For wisdom for delegates as they prepare and attend cluster meetings this month.
- For courage to study scripture with Jesus as the center so we lean into a meaningful life of Spirit-led living.
- That in spite of the pressures that trap us in the same ruts day after day, month after month, and year after year, we can find freedom in Christ to love God and our neighbors and to make disciples.

I look forward to walking together this year. ■

*"So as Conference does this strategic work in the context of the last few years, wouldn't it be a shame to come out with only a reorganization? Wouldn't it be a shame if we didn't also grow as disciples?"*

## Retreat offers couples time for rest, reconnection



Deer Creek State Park Lodge was the site of the Ohio Conference Pastor-Spouse Retreat Nov. 10-12. Fourteen couples participated in the retreat.

Fourteen couples attended the Ohio Conference Pastor-Spouse Retreat, which was held Nov. 10-12 at Deer Creek State Park Lodge in Mt. Sterling, Ohio. The theme of the weekend gathering was “Fill my Cup,” and participants were encouraged to rest, be re-

freshed and reconnect with their spouse.

Our thanks go to the sponsors who helped to underwrite this event: Hummel Group, Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Oak Grove Mennonite Church in West Liberty, and

Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold.

To view additional photos from the retreat (taken during the “Not-So-Newlywed Game”), go to the Ohio Conference website: <https://bit.ly/2024Pastor-SpousePhotos>. ■

## Ohio MCC Comforter Bash planned for March 8-9

Fairlawn Mennonite Church in Apple Creek will host the third annual Ohio MCC Comforter Bash on March 8 and 9. The church is located at 8520 Emerson Road, Apple Creek.

All are invited to knot comforters for Mennonite Central Committee. Women, men, youth groups, friends and family are invited! Come and go as you are able. Hours are as follows: Friday, March 8 — 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m., and Saturday, March 9 — 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Food will be available for a donation.

Comforter tops and backs are needed for this event. Please see the MCC website for de-

tails: <https://mcc.org/events/ohio-mcc-comforter-bash>. ■



Volunteers knotted 220 comforters during the Ohio MCC Comforter Bash in 2023. Pictured are (left to right) Elijah King, Isaac Obri, Allison Hochstetler, Chloe Obri, Mara Steiner and Harris Steiner. This year Fairlawn Mennonite in Apple Creek will host the event March 8-9.

GRACE & GROUNDINGS

# Grace & Groundings offers resources

**By Alysa Short**  
**Ohio Conference**  
**Coordinator of Volunteers**

**Grace & Groundings, Ohio Conference's resource team focused on racial awareness and reconciliation, wants to bring your attention to a number of upcoming opportunities:**

- Podcast series — Be sure to follow the [Ohio Conference Cast](#) on your podcast platform as there will be a new episode out each month from January through May focusing on various topics to draw you into deeper conversations regarding issues of social righteousness and shalom.
- Black History Month — February is a month-long

celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time to specifically recognize their role in U.S. history.

- Social Justice Sunday — **June 23** will be Social Justice Sunday. Grace & Groundings will provide resources, available this spring, to guide your congregation in bringing light to certain issues. If June 23 does not work as a date for your congregation to observe Social Justice Sunday, you are encouraged to choose another Sunday to declare as your Social Justice Sunday.

In addition to these upcoming events, we would also like to



hear from YOU! What would you like to hear about in relation to race and other kingdom righteousness and shalom topics? Send your thoughts and ideas to [grace&groundings@gmail.com](mailto:grace&groundings@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

To learn more about Grace & Groundings, see the Ohio Conference website: <https://bit.ly/RacialReconciliationResources>. ■

## RESOURCE CORNER

# Safe Church offers tools for abuse prevention

**By Ann Leaman**  
**Ohio Conference**  
**Resource Advocate**

This month I would like to highlight **Safe Church**, which is Mennonite Church USA's newly formed abuse prevention ministry.

Safe Church now has a webpage available on the Mennonite Church USA website: <https://bit.ly/MCUSASafeChurch>. The



# Safe Church

webpage offers resources to help faith communities keep children, youth and vulnerable adults safe from abuse of any kind. Safe Church offers curriculum, policy guidelines, consul-

tations, and trainings to assist in abuse prevention.

Among other materials, the webpage contains a major update to the Circle of Grace curriculum: <https://bit.ly/MCUSACircleofGrace>. ■

# Women in Leadership Retreat to equip women to use their leadership gifts

**Coming in February:**  
**“Finding Your Voice”** will be the theme of the **2024 Ohio Conference Women in Leadership Retreat**. This retreat is planned for **Feb. 2-3 at the Lial Renewal Center in Whitehouse, Ohio.**

Presenter for the retreat will be Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, dean of lifelong learning at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. She will lead participants in exploring what it means to claim the fullness of their identity as leaders created in God’s image.

This retreat is for **ALL** women — pastors and other congregational leaders such as MYF sponsors, mentor coordinators, Sunday school teachers and superintendents, Christian education leaders, delegates, commission leaders, or those in other positions. It is also for women who want to explore possibilities for using their gifts in church leadership.

This overnight retreat will be a time for participants to learn, laugh, and fellowship with each other.

The registration deadline is **Jan. 12**. For more information, see the retreat brochure: <https://bit.ly/2024WILRetreatBrochure>. Register online at <https://bit.ly/2024WomeninLeadership>. ■



## Retreat participants reflect

What is it like to participate in the Women in Leadership Retreat? Two participants from the retreat in 2022 reflect on their experiences:

“I did enjoy the retreat and the input from Rebecca Slough. Some of the activities pushed me out of my comfort zone a bit, but I enjoyed the interactions with other women from the Ohio Conference. One of the main messages for me was that I will not always get everything right and not everything will always go well, but that’s OK. There will always be support and love from the Holy Spirit and from others as I pursue where God is leading me.”

— Bev Armstrong

“The 2022 Women in Leadership conference gave me the opportunity to find companionship, rest, and encouragement with women in Ohio Conference who understand what it means to be in all sorts of leadership roles in the church. We sang and ate together, took walks on the grounds and played games in the evening. What a gift to get away with other women and witness the many and unique gifts at work in the kingdom.”

— Christiana Peterson

# Conference Calendar

## JAN 2024

- 9 Winter Delegate Cluster Meeting, Tedrow Mennonite Church, Wauseon
- 11 Winter Delegate Cluster Meeting, Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville
- 11 Ohio Conference Winter Read, online
- 16 Winter Delegate Cluster Meeting, Crown Hill Mennonite Church, Rittman
- 18 Winter Delegate Cluster Meeting, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, West Liberty
- 18 Ohio Conference Winter Read, online
- 22 Winter Delegate Cluster Meeting, online

## FEB

- 1 Ohio Conference Winter Read, online
- 2-3 Women in Leadership Retreat, Lial Event Center, Whitehouse, Ohio
- 8 Ohio Conference Winter Read, online
- 15 Ohio Conference Winter Read, online

## MAR

- 1-2 Annual Conference Assembly, Sharon Mennonite Church, Plain City
- 8-9 MCC Comforter Bash, Fairlawn Mennonite Church, Apple Creek

adapt the Instituto Bíblico Anabautista (IBA – Anabaptist Bible Institute) digital resources to better serve participants in virtual settings. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/MEAHispanicMinistries-Grant>.

**Mennonite Mission Network** is offering an Anti-Racism Grant specifically for individuals and organizations managed by Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous or other People of Color groups who are engaged in peacebuilding, social justice and anti-racism efforts. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/MMNAnti-RacismGrants>.

**Expand your leadership skills through Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's new Practical Leadership Training modules!** Upcoming modules include Pastoral and Congregational Financial Wellness (online workshop); Riding the Wave of Conflict and Change (webinar); Seeing through Technology (webinar); Funding Congregational Ministry after COVID-19 (online workshop); and more. CEUs are available. Register for one or more modules. For more information, see [ambse.edu/plt](https://ambse.edu/plt). ■

## Back page briefings...

**At the 2023 Annual Conference Assembly,** Bill and Carole Schumacher of Sharon Mennonite Church shared a presentation about the Arsenic Mitigation Project, which focuses on removing arsenic from the water supply in Bangladesh. The Schumachers have continued to work

with this project. To learn more, see the project's most recent newsletter: <https://bit.ly/11-23ArsenicMitigation>.

**Mennonite Education Agency Hispanic Ministries** has received a \$15,500 grant from The Schowalter Foundation to

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For more Ohio Conference news, visit the Ohio Conference website: [ohiomennoniteconference.org](https://ohiomennoniteconference.org)