

Ohio Mennonite Conference Strategic Plan 2024

Introduction: The Strategic Plan of 2024-2027 flows from the discernment of God's invitation to Ohio Mennonite Conference. Through two years of communal discernment, delegates and Conference leaders listened for God's invitation to Ohio Mennonite Conference. We heard an invitation to a deeper commitment to know God and to live as Jesus lived and loved. We heard God's invitation to be the church and to

- “feed my sheep” in supporting the congregations and pastors of Ohio Mennonite Conference.
- study the scriptures with Christ as the center.
- equip congregations in actively participating and ministering in their broader neighborhoods and communities.
- be counter-cultural and to offer something different from the world.

Identity: The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995), affirmed by Ohio Mennonite Conference in 1997, is the teaching guide for belief and practice within the Conference. Ohio Mennonite Conference has an Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith with three core values:

- 1) Jesus is the center of our faith.
 - 2) Christ-centered community is the center of our lives.
 - 3) Gospel-grounded reconciliation is the center of our work.
- (See *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* by Palmer Becker.)

The Conference is made up of individual congregations whose ministers are credentialed by Ohio Mennonite Conference. Ohio Mennonite Conference has the autonomy and authority to determine its own policies, credentialing guidelines, budget, structure, staff, and congregational membership.

Ohio Mennonite Conference is affiliated with Mennonite Church USA. Individual congregations may affiliate with both Ohio Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA, with only Ohio Mennonite Conference, or with both Ohio Mennonite Conference and another Anabaptist/Mennonite entity.

Vision: We envision a thriving Conference of congregations united around Jesus as the Center of who we are and all we do.

Mission: 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.”

***Gather, Equip & Send
To
Love God, Love others, Make Disciples of Jesus Christ***

Focus for 2024-2027:

Ohio Mennonite Conference will focus on the following three areas:

- Support for Congregations
 - By October 2024, create an ad hoc team to re-imagine and implement a dynamic Ohio Mennonite Conference Gathering to be held in the summer of 2026 to inspire and disciple at least 100 children, adults, and youth of all congregations through joint worship, Jesus-centered study of scripture, fellowship, and workshops designed to teach or equip congregations to be active in their communities.
 - By 2025 focus on deepening an understanding of Anabaptist theology and identity in at least one seminar at each Annual Conference Gathering, and at one of the two delegate cluster meetings for each cluster. Other opportunities include guest sermons from Conference leaders by invitation from congregations, and four columns per year in Ohio Mennonite Conference publications. The goal of these efforts is to help congregations understand who they are and the ways that they are called to be different from the world or culture. The areas of women in leadership, anti-racism, and peace will be particular focus areas.
 - By 2025, develop a system to help congregations to network among themselves to learn from each other, to build relationships across differences, to combine resources, to take action together, and to share in each other's lives.
 - As needed, support congregations, their pastors, and congregational leaders with assistance in conflict situations, pastoral misconduct, congregational visioning and self-assessment, spaces for dialogue in a time of polarization, or questions of viability or growth.
 - Support congregations with pastoral searches. Congregations affiliated with MC USA will have access to the MC USA Ministerial Leadership Information database.
- Support for Pastors
 - By December 2024, three or more of the monthly Pastor Peer Groups will be led by a peer pastor in the group. Pastor Peer Groups will not meet in the months when all Ohio Mennonite Conference pastors gather.
 - Beginning in 2024, gather all credentialed leaders two times per year to study scripture together through the lens of Jesus.
 - Continuing from 2024, a mentor pastor will meet monthly with each pastor seeking ordination.

- By 2025 have five potential new pastors participating in Conference-approved pastoral training program with funding assistance from the Pastoral Leadership Development Fund (endowment).
- By 2026 lead a gathering for congregational leadership teams to explore questions of visioning, self-assessment, leading change processes in congregations, viability, growth, and succession plans for times of transition and uncertainty.
- Sponsor a biennial Women in Leadership Retreat for current and future pastors and lay leaders with a 35% increase in attenders by 2026. Part of this will occur by encouraging experienced women leaders to invite a younger woman to attend with them.
- Support for Congregations' action witness in their communities
 - By 2025 add resources to the Ohio Mennonite Conference website for topics such as listening to the community, community participation, violence, mental health, loneliness and isolation, addiction, underemployment, conflict transformation, and other community needs.
 - In 2024-2026, the Grace and Groundings team will continue to resource pastors and congregations in the area of racial reconciliation so they learn, act, and reflect in order to grow in witness and discipleship, promoting kingdom righteousness and shalom.
 - By June 2024 include congregations' stories of evangelism and community participation in Ohio Mennonite Conference communications (4) times. There will be at least quarterly storytelling by 2025.
 - By 2025, use each Ohio Mennonite Conference gathering as an opportunity for congregations to encourage each other to take the church outside their walls.
 - By 2024, the program coordinator will include networking conversations about community participation among Ohio Mennonite Conference delegates as a regular part of each cluster meeting. Resource suggestions will be gathered from delegates to add to the website.
 - Each year, continue distributing ministry grants from a portion of any remaining accumulated surplus funds to Ohio Mennonite Conference congregations or ministry partners.

Structure and Staffing

Conference Assembly:

The Conference Assembly, made up of delegates, is the governance body of Ohio Mennonite Conference. The Conference Assembly receives reports and makes decisions on such things as slates of appointees, strategic plans, constitutional amendments, resolutions, funding, and annual budgets. The Conference Assembly meets annually.

There are three ways of becoming a delegate:

Credentialed delegates serve by virtue of their credentialed status. They do not serve on behalf of a particular congregation.

Congregational delegates are appointed by their respective congregations. The number of delegates per congregation aligns with their number of members according to the Constitution. Congregational delegates lead in Conference discernment and decision-making on behalf of their respective congregations. Congregational delegates serve as a two-way communication liaison between the Conference and the congregations.

Conference delegates serve by virtue of having a leadership role in Ohio Mennonite Conference and do not serve on behalf of a particular congregation.

Delegates meet in fall and winter regional cluster meetings for generative discussion, discernment, and information sharing.

Leadership Council:

The Leadership Council is made up of Conference leaders and Conference staff. The Leadership Council provides the spiritual leadership needed to support congregations and pastors. It meets between assemblies for discernment, strategic and operational decision-making, to process potential ministry grants, and to set the agenda for the delegates. It oversees the work of Conference committees.

Conference Leaders:

- Moderator
- Moderator Elect
- Stewardship Chair
- Gifts Discernment Representative
- Credentialing Representative

Conference Staff (Changes are currently in process for budget reasons. Interim positions will continue through the end of their agreements.)

- 1 FTE (Full-time equivalent) Conference Minister
- .5 FTE Associate Conference Minister
- 1.5 FTE allotted for program coordination, administration, bookkeeping, and digital communication.
 - Of the 1.5 FTE, .25 FTE may be outsourced to cover one of the skill sets listed above.

Conference Committees (to transition after March 2024):

Conference Committees are working committees that support the Conference. They are assigned work by the Leadership Council and report to the Leadership Council through their chair or a representative on the Leadership Council.

- Credentialing Committee: Chair +4
- Stewardship Committee: Chair + 4
- Gifts Discernment Committee: Chair +4
- Program Committee: Staff person charged with program coordination + 5
- Ad hoc committees are appointed as needed by the Leadership Council for limited times to address questions of congregational viability and growth and as needed for specific Conference tasks, programs, or events.