

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Ohio Mennonite Conference Strategic Plan

#### January 2024

Over the past two years, delegates have talked together, prayed together, and listened to God's calling. The Strategic Plan is an imperfect attempt to express an understanding of where God is calling Ohio Conference. We trust that God has led this process of discernment and that the Strategic Plan points the Conference in the direction of God's invitation.

When the Conference goes through a time of change, it is natural to feel some level of anxiety. We all have different levels of comfort with change.

The Strategic Plan has been sharpened and clarified through review by the delegates in the January cluster meetings. Delegates were also invited to email additional questions, concerns, or points to clarify. Their responses shaped the final drafts of the Strategic Plan and Constitution that delegates will share with their congregations.

#### 1. **Where did this Strategic Plan come from?**

The entire content of the Ohio Mennonite Conference Strategic Plan 2024-2027 comes from the work of Ohio Mennonite Conference delegates over the past 22 months. At the January delegate cluster meetings, delegates noted that multiple people had the opportunity to speak into the process, that the plan accurately reflects the work of the delegates, and that the Leadership listened and built the plan from the ground up.

#### 2. **What remains the same in this Strategic Plan?**

- Continued affirmation of the Conference identity
- The plan builds in the mission statement adopted by delegates in 2022: *"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<sup>1</sup> and Jesus' Great Commission."*
- Continued clarity that the purpose of Ohio Conference is support for leaders and congregations.

#### 3. **What are the differences for Ohio Mennonite Conference in the Strategic Plan?**

- The new strategic plan and constitution emphasizes that congregations *own* the Conference as an association of member congregations. Ohio Conference exists because its member congregations want it to exist. Congregations are accountable to the other congregations that make up the Conference, and the Conference is accountable to the congregations who created it and sustain it.
- In the proposed strategic plan, congregations and their pastors are invited to lean in towards the other congregations, providing mutual accountability, resourcing, and a web of relationships and fellowship as named in delegate meetings. Congregations support each other through the network of Ohio Conference to reach out into their communities. Congregations rely on resources that come from a web of other congregations coordinated by Ohio Conference staff under the Ohio Conference identity.
- The Conference staff provide pastoral leadership and play a coordination and delegation role among congregations and pastors.
- The plan reflects the delegates' call to focus on faithfulness, attend to relationships, work across differences, and move forward with mission. The Strategic Plan calls for re-imagining Conference

Gatherings as an Ohio Mennonite Conference-wide time of worship, teaching, and fellowship for participants of all ages from all congregations in the Conference.

- More emphasis on programming by providing more staff time FTE to coordinate the focus on support for pastors, congregations, and congregations' action witness in their communities.
- The proposed governance and leadership structure fits the focus, the size of the Conference and the available resources. Staff time is reduced by one full-time equivalent (FTE). Fewer long-term committee members are needed as more work is done with shorter-term volunteers serving on ad hoc teams.
- There is no geographic division of the conference with regional pastors. Revised job descriptions will allow the Conference Minister and half-time Associate Conference Minister to together provide pastoral care and coordination with more phone calls and online meetings and less expectation of traveling.
- The Strategic Plan includes a constitutional revision that reflects the current context of the Conference and separates long-term governance from a three-year strategic plan.

#### **4. What about the question of affiliation?**

There are no current plans to begin another round of discernment about affiliation. The question of affiliation was addressed during the first year of the two-year strategic planning process. A resolution to disaffiliate with MC USA did not pass at ACA 2023. At that time, delegates' responses focused on continuing in loving relationship while acknowledging differences, "continue being church," "focus on our local church, and outreach and church members," "relationship building between congregations" and similar themes. Based on those responses from delegates, the Leadership heard a call to focus the time and energy of the Conference on creating and implementing the Strategic Plan. The plan names affiliation options for congregations.

#### **5. Is this plan realistic? Where did the number targets come from?**

We cannot predict the future. The Strategic Plan is based on trust in God's presence throughout the discernment process of strategic planning.

Each of the goals in the three focus areas has a SMART goal that is meant to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound. The Strategic Planning team created goals based on the deliberations of the delegates and what they felt was achievable. Setting specific measurable and do-able targets keeps the Conference accountable. Reporting happens in reference to those targets. "We planned for 5 pastors in training. We had 4 potential pastors in training."

#### **6. Who is going to do all the work, especially with less staff?**

The Leadership Council (staff and Conference leaders) will either directly implement, coordinate, or delegate the work named in the plan. Lay and credentialed volunteers working in teams and networks will play a central role in carrying out the work of the conference. When asked, "Who will do all the things listed in the Strategic Plan?", the answer is "We (volunteers from member congregations) will do it," rather than "They (paid Conference staff) will do it."

#### **7. Who drafted the proposed Strategic Plan, based on the work of the delegates?**

The Strategic Planning Team included Ken Sims (Moderator), Paula Snyder Belousek (Assistant Moderator), Andrew Blount (Stewardship Ministry Chair), Matt Weaver (Gifts Discernment Ministry Chair) Rachele Lyndaker Schlabach (Credentialing Ministry Representative), Alysa Short (Coordinator of Volunteers), Tony Doehrmann (Regional Pastor), Larry Rohrer (Interim Regional Pastor), Judy King

(Administrative Assistant), Dick Barrett (Retired Conference Minister), Dan Miller (Interim Conference Minister), Joel Short (Witness Focus Leader), Valerie Jones (Worship Focus Leader), Alan Kauffman (MDT Member), Ann Leaman (Conference Editor), Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi (Process Consultant)