

**CONSTITUTION
OF THE OHIO MENNONITE CONFERENCE**

**Adopted by the Delegates
at Annual Conference Assembly
March 1-2, 2024**

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CONSTITUTION OF THE OHIO MENNONITE CONFERENCE

ARTICLE 1: IDENTIFICATION

The Ohio Mennonite Conference was incorporated as an organization of congregations in 1969 under the laws of the State of Ohio. This conference is a merger of two conferences. The Ohio Mennonite Conference was founded in 1834. The Eastern Amish Mennonite Conference began in 1893, following Amish ministers' meetings. The two conferences merged in 1927 to become the Ohio Mennonite and Eastern Amish Mennonite Joint Conference. That name was changed to Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference in 1954. The Ohio Mennonite Christian Workers' Conference and the Ohio Mennonite Mission Board merged with the Conference at its incorporation in 1969. After the eastern congregations of the Conference organized as the Atlantic Coast Conference in 1978, the remainder was renamed the Ohio Conference of the Mennonite Church in 1979. In 2002 the Ohio Conference chose to become part of the newly integrated Mennonite Church USA, and was identified as the Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA. In 2024 the name changed to Ohio Mennonite Conference to recognize that some congregations no longer affiliate with Mennonite Church USA.

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

Gather, Equip and Send

to

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 Mennonite Conference
is to Gather, Equip and Send our congregations
by the power of the Holy Spirit
to live out God's Greatest Commandments¹ and Jesus' Great Commission.²*

In order to fulfill our mission, Ohio Mennonite Conference supports, connects and leads in ways that equip and empower our congregations to enlarge the faith community in obedience to Jesus Christ.

¹ Mark 12:29-31

² Matthew 28:18-20

B. Role of the Congregation

The congregation is a local assembly of God's people uniting in worship, faith, witness, fellowship, proclamation, service, discernment, mutual care, and discipline. In association with

other congregations in this conference and/or the larger church, the congregation is the primary unit through which the mission of the church is carried out. Congregations are accountable to each other in their faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

C. Purpose of Conference

The primary purpose of the Conference is to provide support for congregations and pastors, including their work in their local communities. The Conference equips pastors, worship leaders, teachers, and church committee members.

The Conference builds on the Anabaptist Mennonite perspective to form the Conference identity. The Conference will help congregations clarify their own identities to meet the needs of their communities.

The Conference will strengthen relationships between churches within the Conference, providing networking and resourcing possibilities between churches with similar circumstances and needs. The Conference will also strengthen relationships with church-wide agencies and institutions as well as with community agencies that share Conference beliefs and mission.

Although the Conference's affiliation is with Mennonite Church USA, Ohio Mennonite Conference welcomes as members congregations that have chosen not to affiliate with Mennonite Church USA.

ARTICLE III: RELATIONSHIPS

A. Geographic cluster groups facilitate mutual communication between the Conference and congregations and among congregations in the geographic areas. Credentialed Conference staff arrange for and moderate cluster group meetings.

B. Conference to Congregations

As the entity established and maintained by affiliated congregations for the purpose of gathering, equipping, and sending, the Conference is to:

1. Be an administrative resource to enable joint efforts for and on behalf of member congregations.
2. Assist congregations in securing good pastoral leadership, maintaining leadership guidelines, and validating, recording, and transferring ministerial credentials.
3. Provide liaison with and resources to congregations through conference staff and conference minister.
4. Provide guidance and resources to congregations via staff and volunteer personnel.
5. Give help in special needs, as requested by the congregation or at the initiative of the Leadership Council.

6. Work at mutual responsibility between the Conference and congregations.

C. Congregations to Conference

As the sponsoring base in the relationship, congregations are each to:

1. Participate by way of delegates in the decisions, work, and mission of the Conference.
2. Be willing to support the work of the Conference by sending both credentialed and lay members as volunteers to serve in the various positions of the Conference.
3. Support spiritually and financially the work of the Conference.
4. Give counsel to and receive counsel from the Conference through its designated representatives.
5. Be open to work at all facets of mutual responsibility between congregations and the Conference.
6. Share their needs so that the Conference can respond to those needs.

D. Congregation to Congregation

Affiliation with the Conference brings member congregations into significant relationship with each other. This relationship of interdependence is enabled and enhanced through:

1. Cluster groups which facilitate collaborative activities and broaden fellowship.
2. Consulting with Conference congregations on matters of congregational actions and programs that may affect them.
3. Sharing of resources (personnel, material, and financial) among other congregations.
4. Networking among congregations to learn from one another and to implement various ministries, such as church planting or providing aid and assistance to individuals and groups in need.

E. Conference to Denomination

For maintaining its affiliation with Mennonite Church USA, the Conference is to:

1. Appoint and assist Conference delegates to Mennonite Church USA General Assembly to participate in effective church-wide decision making.
2. Establish and maintain channels for communication and consultation between Mennonite Church USA agencies and the Conference and its constituent congregations that have chosen to maintain an affiliation with Mennonite Church USA.

F. Congregation to Denomination

For participating in its affiliation with Mennonite Church USA the congregations which are members of Mennonite Church USA are to appoint and assist delegates to Mennonite Church USA General Assembly to participate in effective church-wide decision making.

G. Regional, National and Mennonite Church USA-Related Ministries

The Conference recognizes various sister conferences, Mennonite Church USA agencies and Inter-Mennonite organizations that work with other Mennonite denominations and other constituencies. Where these involve Conference representation and participation, the Leadership Council shall be responsible for defining and facilitating the relationship. Where congregations are represented directly, the Leadership Council shall usually be the channel for information and counsel on programs, solicitations, and other matters of relevance to the Conference.

H. Organizations with Specific Reference to Ohio or Ohio Conference

The Conference recognizes various organizations created to serve the Ohio Mennonite Conference constituency and beyond. Organizations serve an outreach or service function that may benefit from a working relationship with Ohio Conference. Organizations facilitate functional and cooperative work with other Mennonite Church USA area conferences. Determination of eligibility and the nature of the relationship rests with the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council may confer with the Conference Assembly for input and advice.

ARTICLE IV: MEMBERSHIP

A. Eligibility for Membership

Congregations are eligible for membership when they:

1. Have a membership of baptized persons who have covenanted to be a congregation.
2. Have adequate provision for Conference-approved pastoral leadership.
3. Have sufficient organization to carry on congregational life.
4. Have made the following Conference commitments:
 - a. Accept the biblical faith as expressed in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (c. 1995) affirmed by Ohio Mennonite Conference in 1997, as the teaching guide for belief and practice.
 - b. Show a willingness to give counsel and receive counsel from the Conference and its constituent congregations.
 - c. Show a readiness to share responsibility in the program of the Conference with

interests, prayers, personnel, and financial support toward the budget.

B. Procedures for Securing Membership

1. A congregation may apply for membership to the Leadership Council through the conference minister.
2. A congregation, through its leadership, shall certify to the Leadership Council its eligibility for membership.
3. The Leadership Council will recommend that the Conference Assembly receive the congregation as a member of the Conference. The congregation will be received upon a 75 percent delegate vote of affirmation.
4. Emerging congregations are expected to make use of Conference resources.
5. New congregations should emerge from existing congregations only when a congregation decides to divide for practical or mission reasons. If a new congregation emerges out of congregational disunity, it may apply for Conference membership after one year.

C. Procedures for Maintaining Membership

1. Member congregations share in Conference programs, as they are able, with interest, prayers, personnel, and financial support of the annual spending plan.
2. Congregations select and send delegates to scheduled sessions of Conference Assembly.
3. Each congregation is expected to be accountable to other Conference congregations in faithfulness to Jesus Christ in such matters as theology, practices, stewardship, nurture, and mission.
4. The Conference provides suitable structures for congregations to fulfill their accountability to each other and to the Conference.

D. Procedures for Terminating Membership

1. When a congregation's continuing membership is in question, conflict transformation resources shall be used if at all possible.
2. We expect a congregation considering the termination of its membership to engage in discussion with the conference minister before congregational action is taken.
3. A congregation may, through its leadership, request the Leadership Council to terminate its Conference membership. The Conference requests an explanation of the congregation's reasons for terminating membership.
4. A congregation's membership in the Conference may be terminated upon

recommendation by the Leadership Council and action by the delegates to Conference Assembly.

5. After membership is terminated, disposition of property used by the congregation that is in the name of the Conference shall be determined by the Leadership Council of Ohio Mennonite Conference, taking into account the wishes of the congregation and the amount of money invested by the Conference.

ARTICLE V: CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY

A. Purpose

The Conference Assembly is the governance body of Ohio Mennonite Conference. Delegates participate in a year-long, ongoing process of decision-making that includes the Leadership Council, delegate cluster meetings, and a Conference Assembly. The Conference will be held within 60 days prior to the close of the fiscal year of Ohio Mennonite Conference at a time and place determined by the Leadership Council.

There may be matters arising from the discernment process that require a decision by the delegates while present at the Conference Assembly. When this is the case, the Leadership Council will take time in general session for processing these decisions. If a vote is needed, each delegate will have one vote.

Special Assembly meetings may be called by the Leadership Council after they provide 90 days notice to Conference churches. The notice shall specify the agenda and any action needed in this Special Assembly.

The Delegates at any regular or special Conference Assembly shall constitute a quorum for discernment and decision making.

ARTICLE VI: CONFERENCE DELEGATES

A. The following are delegates and have voting privileges:

1. Ordained and licensed ministers with active service assignments recognized by the Conference and who hold and maintain ministerial credentials through the Credentialing Committee.
2. Members of Leadership Council and Credentialing, Stewardship, Gifts Discernment, and Program committees.
3. Delegates selected by Conference congregations, with two delegates from each congregation with membership of 50 members or less, and one additional delegate for each additional 100 members, or fraction thereof. Two-year terms are recommended to provide continuity. Congregations are encouraged to have a wide variety of members as delegates to expose Conference to, and receive the benefit of, an ever-wider group of

congregational leaders.

4. An optional additional delegate in addition to the number already allowed (as described in Article VI:A.3.) is allotted to every congregation to be filled by a young adult between the ages of 16-25. One of the other delegates from the young adult's congregation should act as a mentor to the young adult delegate.

B. Qualifications of Congregational Delegates

Congregations shall choose as delegates members in good standing who manifest spiritual discernment and mature judgment, are actively involved in congregational life and organization, represent the diversity of the membership, and express a commitment to attend and become actively involved in cluster meetings, Conference Assembly and other interactive communication that request delegate input and decision-making.

C. Role of Congregational Delegates

Congregational delegates shall:

1. Represent their congregation to the Conference.
2. Communicate Conference work and ministry to their congregation.
3. Invite the congregation to financially support the ministry of the Conference.
4. Read Conference communications to keep informed of the latest Conference happenings.
5. Attend area cluster group meetings where much of the information sharing, discussion and discernment will take place.
5. Attend the Conference Assembly.
6. Find ways to apply the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in their own congregation and community.
8. Serve as a communication liaison between the Conference and the congregation. Regularly report Conference activity to the congregation and members and seek input from the congregation.

ARTICLE VII: LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

A. Membership

The Leadership Council provides the spiritual leadership needed to support the congregations and pastors of the Ohio Mennonite Conference. It meets between assemblies for discernment, strategic and operational decision-making, and to set the agenda for the delegate gatherings. It oversees the work of Conference Committees.

The Leadership Council consists of the moderator, moderator elect, Credentialing Committee representative, Gifts Discernment Committee representative, and Stewardship Committee chair.

A moderator elect is elected every two (2) years and after serving a two-year term shall succeed to the office of moderator for a two-year term. At the request of the moderator, or in case of the absence or disability of the moderator, the moderator elect will exercise all rights and duties of the moderator. The moderator elect and the moderator will not be eligible for consecutive terms in either role. All other non-staff Leadership Council members are confirmed for two-year terms with a maximum of three consecutive terms. The Leadership Council also includes the conference minister and all Conference staff. Decisions are made by consensus.

B. Supervision

1. Members of the Leadership Council are confirmed by the Conference Assembly and are directly accountable to and act on behalf of the Conference Assembly as authorized by the Constitution or as specifically authorized from time to time by action of the Conference Assembly.
2. The moderator supervises the conference minister.
3. The conference minister supervises all other paid staff.

C. Functions of the Leadership Council

1. Ensure that Ohio Conference is accomplishing its vision. Supervise the conference minister through the moderator.
2. Hold all deeds to Conference property and fulfill all legal requirements. The moderator and Stewardship chair of the Conference are authorized to execute all documents pertaining to the purchase or sale of property or real estate.
3. Ensure adequate planning in preparation for the Conference Assembly.
4. Organize a search committee for the conference minister position and appoint the conference minister on behalf of the Ohio Mennonite Conference.
5. Appoint Conference representatives to the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA and Conference delegates to Mennonite Church USA General Assembly
6. Receive financial or other appeals from denominational, partner and Conference-related organizations and give or direct assistance as needed.
7. In cases of conflict of interest, affected members will be excused from the conversation.
8. Non-staff members serve as an accountability group for the conference minister and may meet in executive session.

9. Relate to Mennonite Church USA as well as other Mennonite conferences.
10. Work to develop and maintain associations with affiliated related ministries.
11. Authorize restricted funds expenditures in accordance with the Restricted Funds Policy of the Conference.
12. Authorize the sale of Conference-held property upon the recommendation and/or concurrence of the Stewardship Committee.
113. Serve as interpreter of Conference concerns, actions, and policies to the congregations, and of congregations' counsel to the Conference.
14. Act for the Conference between delegate sessions. Confirm nominees recommended by the Gifts Discernment Committee for unexpired terms.
15. Approve the proposed annual spending plan and forward it for action by the Conference Assembly.
16. Appoint ad hoc committees as necessary to study, recommend, or assist in matters of program, policy, property, or personnel.

D. Officer Responsibilities

1. The moderator chairs the meetings of the Leadership Council and shares the role of chairing the Conference Assembly with the moderator elect.
2. The moderator elect fills the moderator's role at the moderator's request or absence and at the completion of the moderator's term.
2. The Leadership Council appoints a staff member to serve as recording secretary to document the proceedings of the Leadership Council.
4. The Stewardship Chair serves as the Treasurer of the Conference.

VIII: STANDING COMMITTEES

A. General Policies

Standing committees are accountable to the delegates through the Leadership Council. Standing committees provide annual reports of their work to the Leadership Council, which forwards the reports to delegates.

Except as noted, all terms are for two years, with a maximum of three consecutive terms per Committee. Exceptions to the six-year limit are at the discretion of the Leadership Council. For the purpose of continuity terms should be staggered. Appointments are made by the Conference Assembly upon the recommendation of the Gifts Discernment Committee. Standing Committees

are accountable to the Leadership Council.

Spending plan requests for standing ministries are made by the Leadership Council. Expenses of these ministries are monitored and approved by the Stewardship Committee.

B. Credentialing Committee

1. Membership

The Credentialing Committee consists of a chairperson, up to four additional members and the conference minister.

2. Purpose Statement

The Credentialing Committee exists to assure that the Conference congregations have suitable, approved, cared-for, accountable pastoral leadership.

3. Relationship to:

- a. *Credentialed Staff* - The Credentialing Committee will work with credentialed staff in the credentialing of pastors for serving Conference congregations or other specialized ministries. Credentialed staff may attend Credentialing Committee meetings as needed.
- b. *Ohio Mennonite Conference Congregations* - The Credentialing Committee will work with congregations through credentialed staff.
- c. The Credentialing Committee has access to ministerial information and resources through the Office of Church Vitality of Mennonite Church USA.

4. Functions

- a. Credentials for Pastors
 - 1) It is the responsibility of the Credentialing Committee to establish policy and procedures for the credentialing of pastors called to serve Ohio Mennonite Conference congregations and/or other specialized ministries.
 - 2) The Credentialing Committee will examine ministerial candidates, act upon congregational requests for licensure, ordination, and transfer of leadership credentials, and authorize the conference minister and/or another credentialed staff and/or a member of the Credentialing Committee to officiate on behalf of the Conference in such situations.
 - 3) The Credentialing Committee will oversee the implementation of disciplinary procedures in accordance with Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures.

- b. Education and Nurture
 - 1) Establish educational requirements for credentialing and promote continuing professional development in consultation with the Leadership Council.
 - 2) Manage the Pastoral Leadership Development Fund which provides financial assistance to pastors and pastors-in-training.
 - 3) Assist credentialed staff in offering guidance and care for retired pastors.
- c. Vision for the Future
 - 1) Develop strategies to identify, nurture, and call prospective pastoral leaders from within the congregation.
 - 2) Provide financial support for the Ministry Inquiry Program of Mennonite colleges as it relates to the Ohio Mennonite Conference.

C. Gifts Discernment Committee

1. Membership

The Gifts Discernment Committee consists of a chairperson (appointed by the Leadership Council), a program staff member, and up to four other members, recommended by the Leadership Council and confirmed by the Conference Assembly.

2. Purpose Statement

The Gifts Discernment Committee exists to utilize available spiritual gifts in the work of the Conference by recommending nominees as needed in a spiritually perceptive and sensitive manner.

3. Relationship to:

- a. *Leadership Council* – a representative from the Gifts Discernment Team is a member of the Leadership Council.
- b. *Moderator and Conference Minister* – The chairperson shall be in communication for information and counsel.
- c. *Stewardship, Credentialing and Program Committees* – The Gifts Discernment Committee shall be in communication to be aware of needed persons and gifts.
- d. *Conference Delegates* – The Gifts Discernment Committee shall solicit suggestions from delegates for possible nominees for the various positions.

4. Functions

- a. Compile and maintain a description of the primary responsibilities of each position for which the Committee is asked to propose nominees.
- b. Recommend nominees in due time for:
 - 1) Non-staff Leadership Council members for Conference Assembly action.
 - 2) Members of standing committees in consultation with the respective chairpersons for Conference Assembly action.
 - 3) Any other positions as requested, including vacancies because of uncompleted terms.
- c. Be available as a resource when there is a search for staff persons.

D. Stewardship Committee

1. Membership

The Stewardship Committee consists of the chair and up to four members

2. Purpose

The Stewardship Committee exists to:

- a. Oversee the care and management of Conference finances in order to maintain adequate funding support of Conference programming and administration.
- b. Help Conference leaders, pastors, and congregational members understand and joyfully commit to the practice of biblical stewardship. The goal includes caring for the earth and its environment, practicing mutual aid within the church, and giving sacrificially, generously, and cheerfully of time, energy and financial gifts for God's kingdom work.
- c. Administer the Endowment fund for Ohio Mennonite Conference.
- d. Ensure that responsible remuneration policies and procedures are in place, and that equitable remuneration (including salary and employee benefits) is provided for Conference staff persons.

3. Relationship to:

- a. *Leadership Council* – The chairperson is the Treasurer on the Leadership Council.

- b. The Stewardship Committee works with congregations at the request of the conference minister.
- c. *Everence* – The Stewardship Committee maintains communication with Everence concerning stewardship issues.

4. **Functions**

- a. Assist Ohio Mennonite Conference staff and Leadership Council to monitor memorandums of understanding for each related ministry.
- b. Be responsible for capital funds and endowment funds.
- c. Oversee Ohio Mennonite Conference real estate.
- d. Provide and promote stewardship educational resources and projects to congregations and individuals.
- e. Ensure the implementation of staff remuneration policies of the Ohio Conference.
- f. Make a yearly recommendation to the Leadership Council regarding any staff cost of living or other wage adjustments.
- g. Review employee benefit levels yearly.
- h. Resolve salary and benefit policy questions. The committee will not deal with staff hiring, staff termination, staff performance reviews or other areas of personnel policy.
- i. Develop the Ohio Mennonite Conference spending plan proposal and forward to the Leadership Council to include in the Conference Assembly agenda.

E. Program Committee

1. Membership

The Program Committee is chaired by the staff member working with program and up to five additional members.

2. Purpose

The Program Committee exists to develop the programs that support congregations and pastors. The Program Committee plans Conference Assemblies as well as other programs throughout the year with direction from the Leadership Council.

3. Relationship to:

Leadership Council – The Program Committee is represented on the Leadership Council by the staff member working with program.

4. Functions:

- a. Respond to congregational program needs brought by congregations, staff and others.
- b. Develop programs guided by the focus areas of the Conference.
- c. Conduct studies and surveys to help discern program needs (as appropriate).
- d. Create Ad Hoc Teams to correspond to needs and assist in locating resources needed to conduct programs.
- e. Evaluate programs upon their completion.

ARTICLE IX: CONFERENCE MINISTER

A. Appointment

1. The conference minister is hired and serves at the invitation of the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council conducts the search process for the conference minister.

The Leadership Council assigns hiring and supervision of other Conference staff to the conference minister. The conference minister makes hiring decisions with input from the Leadership Council and within the compensation parameters set by the Stewardship Committee.

2. The conference minister's appointment shall be for a three-year term with eligibility for reappointment if mutually agreeable.

B. Accountability

1. The conference minister is accountable to the Leadership Council and is supervised by the moderator. Other staff persons are supervised by the conference minister.
2. The conference minister conducts a review of the work of staff persons annually. The non-staff Conference leaders conduct a more comprehensive review of the conference minister every three years.

C. Purpose

The conference minister articulates the Conference vision and coordinates Conference ministries and activities. The conference minister ensures the implementation of Conference directives for the benefit of Ohio Conference congregations and pastors.

ARTICLE X: DISSOLUTION

Should the organization be dissolved, and after provision has been made for payment of all the liabilities of the organization, all of the assets of the organization shall be disposed of exclusively for the purposes of the organization, or to such organization or organizations organized and operated exclusively for charitable or religious purposes, consistent with Anabaptist values, as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as amended.

ARTICLE XI: AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of all Conference delegates present, provided that a notice of the proposed change shall be given at least thirty days before the Conference Assembly convenes.

ARTICLE XII: INTERPRETATION

Should questions of interpretation arise regarding any item in this constitution the delegates convened for the Conference Assembly shall have the right of final decision.

ARTICLE XIII: SUSPENSION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Any provision of this constitution may be suspended *temporarily* to expire at the conclusion of the present meeting by an affirmative vote of 90 percent of the delegates present at any duly called Special Conference Assembly of Ohio Mennonite Conference.