

# OHIO MENNONITE EVANGEL

News & Views of Ohio Conference

MAY-JUNE 2024



ohiomennoniteconference.org

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## Oak Grove Preschool Outreach

**By Miriam Zehr**

Retired associate pastor of  
Worship and Education at  
Oak Grove Mennonite  
Church

**Oak Grove Mennonite  
Preschool has been in  
operation since 1975. It  
offers programming for**



**three- and four-year-olds  
on Tuesday and Thursday  
mornings and for four-  
and five-year-olds on  
Monday, Wednesday and  
Friday mornings during  
the school year. We have  
had many connections  
with community families  
over the years. We now  
serve families of  
former  
preschoolers  
whose children  
are now students.**

Oak Grove views  
the preschool as  
part of its outreach.  
Its mission is to  
provide a loving, safe



and quality learning  
environment that is  
unashamedly Christian. An  
advisory committee which  
includes the associate pastor,  
an outreach commission  
member, and the parent of a  
preschooler serves as a  
liaison between the church  
and school. They meet with  
the preschool teacher and  
assistant to get regular  
updates and check on needs  
or issues that arise.

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## Leadership Council gathers for retreat



**The new Ohio  
Conference Leadership  
Council met April 24-25  
at Our Lady of the Pines**

**Retreat Center in Tiffin,  
OH. The purpose of our  
retreat was to get to  
know one another better  
and to intentionally set  
time aside to review the  
2024-26 Strategic Plan  
that was approved at our  
recent Annual  
Conference Assembly.**

As the Leadership Council  
gathered it was with a deep  
sense of gratitude for  
everyone who participated in

and contributed to the work  
of discernment that  
contributed to creating our  
2024-2026 Strategic Plan.  
We trust that the God who  
has been faithful in leading us  
in the work of discernment  
will provide what we need for  
our life together in the  
months and years to come.

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EDITORIAL



## The work of Conference

As I write this, I am one month in to having taken on the role of Communications Coordinator in addition to my role as Program Coordinator. And like any new role, I have been learning a lot. There is a lot of work to do in coordinating both communications and programming.

Yet I continue to remember that I am not on this journey alone. Both of

these roles include the title *Coordinator*. This implies that the work is mine to *coordinate*. And that's where the rest of Ohio Conference comes in.

As a part of the Strategic Plan, created by and for Conference members, it is imperative for us all to remember that we all have a job to do if we want to see Conference's priorities and initiatives thrive.

The work of Conference is simply not possible without

the commitment of volunteers. Are you willing to serve in some way? Why not contact us before we contact you? Or do you know of someone who has gifts in particular areas? Let us know.

Without the dedication of its constituents, Ohio Mennonite Conference could not exist. Ohio Conference is its people; Ohio Conference is you.

-ams

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Editor: Alysa Short

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*Ohio Mennonite Evangel* is distributed to all households of Ohio Conference congregations, other interested individuals and church agencies.

GRACE & GROUNDINGS

## Social Justice Sunday



Grace & Groundings, Ohio Conference's resource team focused on racial awareness and reconciliation, has declared

June 23 as this year's Social Justice Sunday.

Designed to bring attention to areas of social righteousness, June 23 is the 2nd annual Social Justice Sunday celebrated by Ohio Conference congregations.

This year's themes are *Let justice roll down* and

*Celebrate the promise of freedom*, centered around the scriptures of Amos 5:18-24 and Matthew 23:23-24. Resources include suggestions for worship services, including sermon starters.

June 23 is the Sunday closest to Juneteenth,

Continued on page 3

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

Moderator: Paula Snyder Belousek — [pastor@salemmentonite.com](mailto:pastor@salemmentonite.com)  
Credentialing Representative to Leadership Council: Rachele Lyndaker Schlabach — [rachele@millersburgmennonite.org](mailto:rachele@millersburgmennonite.org)

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Stewardship Committee Chair: Andrew Blount — [blountandrew@hotmail.com](mailto:blountandrew@hotmail.com)

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Interim Associate Conference Minister: Larry Rohrer — [ohiorpeast@gmail.com](mailto:ohiorpeast@gmail.com)

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Finance Coordinator: Stan Helmuth — [cbohl@zoominternet.net](mailto:cbohl@zoominternet.net)

Program Coordinator: Alysa Short — [alysashort@gmail.com](mailto:alysashort@gmail.com)

# June 23

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the holiday commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States.

Grace & Groundings encourages all Ohio Conference congregations to celebrate Social Justice Sunday. (If June 23 does not work for your congregation, consider setting aside another Sunday to designate as Social Justice Sunday.)

These resources are available

on Ohio Conference's website or they can be found at <https://ohiomennoniteconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Social-Justice-Sunday-2024.pdf>.



Grace & Groundings is always interested in hearing from you. Share with them your questions and thoughts at [graceandgroundings@gmail.com](mailto:graceandgroundings@gmail.com).

In addition, when you celebrate Social Justice Sunday, be sure to take photos and share them and a description of how you celebrated with Grace & Groundings. Tag us in your Facebook posts or email them to us.

## Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program



Journey is a distance-friendly undergraduate-level program offered by Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). Designed for leaders and emerging leaders, this program can benefit pastors, church planters, those exploring a call to ministry, and other congregational and community lay leaders.

In Journey, participants join with a mentor who walks with them throughout the program. As the participant learns, tries new ideas, tests new skills and

deepens self-understanding, the mentor is there to encourage, challenge, and support them.

There are three components to Journey:

- 1) Online coursework
- 2) Weekend learning events twice a year at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, MI, and at AMBS in Elkhart, IN
- 3) Meetings with a mentor every two weeks

Ohio Conference is one of three participating conferences, along with Indiana-Michigan and Central District, sponsoring the Journey program. As a sponsoring conference, the conference minister, along with another representative from the conference, serve on the Journey Board. Currently Dan Miller as conference minister and Doug King as conference representative serve on the board. Alysa Short serves as a

student representative.

Journey is a collaboration between the student, their congregation, and the conference. According to the AMBS website, "Students from sponsoring conferences enjoy unique benefits and take on unique responsibilities in the Journey program."

Because Ohio Conference is a sponsoring conference, students are eligible for a tuition discount.

The early application deadline for the Fall 2024 cohort is July 11. Contact Interim Conference Minister Dan Miller at [ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com](mailto:ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating in the Journey program.

To learn more information or to apply, visit <https://www.ams.edu/journey-a-missional-leadership-development-program/>.

*Interested in exploring a call to ministry? Want to nurture your leadership abilities or cultivate your spiritual formation? Then the Journey program may be for you!*

CONFERENCE MINISTER MUSINGS

# Centered around Jesus

**By Dan Miller**  
**Interim Conference**  
**Minister**

**As I've been learning about Ohio Conference, hoping to hear the Spirit, and engaging in our work together, Philippians 2:5-11 is a passage that's stuck out to me. Many scholars think this was a hymn used in early church worship that exalted how he went about his mission.**

Here are verses 5-8:

*Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus who although he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but **emptied** himself,*

*taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form he humbled himself and became **obedient** to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

This first half emphasizes that instead of seeking power and authority, Jesus gave up his realistic claim to divinity to live among us. The mission for which God sent Jesus became Jesus' top priority. To pursue this vision, Jesus "emptied himself" of his divine privilege and power to become a servant. Emptying himself didn't mean Jesus had nothing to do, but that instead of acting from the awesome position of God, he acted from a limited human position.

John's gospel illustrates this role of a servant when Jesus takes a basin and towel and washes his disciples' feet. In Philippians 3 Paul mirrors Jesus' self-emptying behavior by listing aspects of his Jewish pedigree and stating, "whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss."

Humans are incredible beings—Gifted. Capable. Worthy of love and care. Made just a little lower than God. Limited. Unable to accomplish all we can think or imagine.

Unable to do everything as a human being that he'd been able to do before, Jesus became obedient. He didn't become an unthinking automaton. Nor was he directed by remote control from heaven. Jesus prayed. He read scripture. He listened. He engaged in discussion. Rather than trying to carry the whole thing, he became obedient to God in those things that were his to do. God's mission was Jesus' priority.

Ohio Mennonite Conference's vision statement imagines a conference centered around Jesus. In such a conference, congregations are gathered, equipped and sent to love God, love others, and make disciples. If that becomes our primary purpose together, there might be obstacles to lay aside in order to live into that mission.

There could be unique obstacles for each congregation and each individual. Perhaps an Anabaptist pedigree, or the absence of one? What about a



desire for a clean and tidy life? Perhaps a reputation for being wise, and a wish that everyone would think like me? Incremental change rather than disruptive change? People of faith – in scripture and in history and in the current time – face obstacles whenever we seek to follow.

In the second half of the hymn, verses 9-11, God acts to do what only God can do: fill Jesus with resurrection life and restore him to his place in heaven. We have our part to play. By becoming obedient to our part of the work, we participate in God's mission to reconcile the world back to God without getting in God's way by taking on God's work. We contribute our part. The rest is God's.

Are there obstacles to lay down individually or as a congregational member in order to prioritize God's mission?

**"Ohio  
Conference's  
vision  
statement  
imagines a  
conference  
centered  
around Jesus."**



# Leadership Council

Continued from page 1

We spent considerable time with the Strategic Plan, particularly reviewing the goals for 2024 and 2025 to begin the work of implementation.

A plan is only as good as our ability to live into the goals we've developed. We spent time in the awareness that while we are responsible for overseeing the work, we cannot and must not be the ones doing all the implementation of the goals on behalf of the conference. Just as the Strategic Plan was developed by all our Conference stakeholders, it is essential for the whole conference to stay engaged. It is congregations, Conference committees, and individual volunteers with the assistance of Conference staff that will ultimately breathe life into this plan.

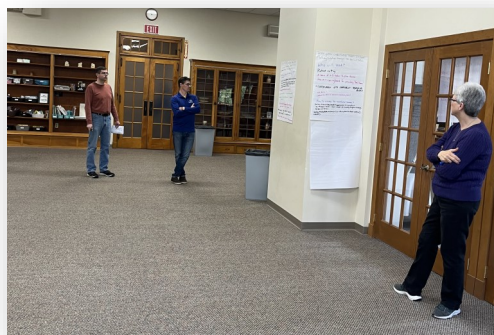
The Holy Spirit has been faithful in guiding us through this process and now is the time to partner with the Spirit of Jesus

to make these ideas, hopes, and dreams a reality.

To assist with this process, the Leadership Council spent time determining who will be responsible for facilitating each goal as well as generating suggestions for how the work could be realized, while leaving ample space for guidance by the Holy Spirit and for those who will take up the work to take it in new or deeper directions.

Over the past two years our consultant, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, modeled and taught us the importance of discernment. As the Leadership Council we do not want to leave this essential spiritual discipline behind.

We spent time individually as well as in smaller groups meditating on Psalm 23 and Philippians 2:1-11, to hear what God might be saying to us and

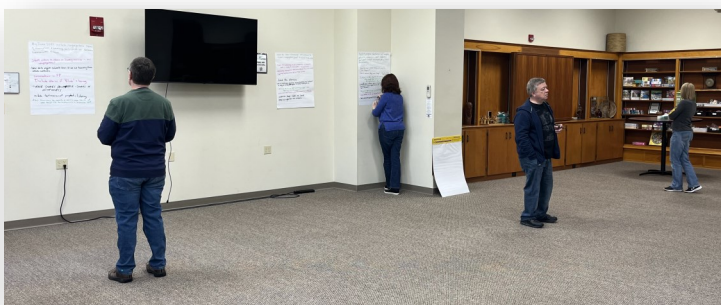


the wider Conference as we implement the Strategic Plan. As we listened, we sensed the deep assurance of God in Jesus' presence with us and that whatever fears, anxieties, or uncertainties we might individually or corporately be carrying about the future of the conference or the Strategic Plan, that our faithful God will stay close and guide us.

We were also reminded that sometimes the path to new life is through death. We do not need to be fearful or resist what might need to die for the sake of new life for our conference. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead also has the power to bring life to our conference and congregations.

We are grateful for the time we were able to spend together and trust that it will assist us in our work together. We continue to covet your prayers for the Leadership Council and our shared conference life as we walk this path together.

*"It is congregations, Conference committees, individual volunteers with the assistance of Conference staff that will ultimately breathe life into this plan."*



## Ohio Conference Vision Statement:

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

## Ohio Conference Mission Statement:

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."

## OBITUARY

# Former Ohio Conference pastor dies at 82



Robert "Bob" Schloneger, age 82, formerly of Ohio Conference, passed away on March 25, 2024, in Goshen, Indiana. Born on April 17, 1941, in Louisville, Ohio, Bob married Enid Miller in 1963. They had three sons and one daughter.

Over the course of his life, Bob served in various ministerial roles, including many in Ohio Conference. He pastored at North Clinton Church (formerly of Ohio Conference) from 1977-1988; at Millersburg Mennonite Church from 1988-1994; and at Walnut Creek Mennonite Church (formerly of Ohio Conference) from 2008-2010.

In addition to congregational pastoring, Bob served as moderator of Ohio Conference from 1988-1992, regional pastor from 1995-1999, and as an Ohio Conference overseer.

Bob and Enid served two years with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Puerto Rico. He also volunteered with Meals on Wheels in his retirement and was a member of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana.

Bob's obituary can be found at <https://www.yoderculpfuneralhome.com/obituary/robert-schloneger>.

*"Oak Grove views the preschool as part of its outreach."*

## Preschool

Continued from page 1

In 2022, the preschool was able to access a Child Care Stabilization Grant to update the facility which meets in the basement of the fellowship hall. With many hours of volunteer labor, the space had some major renovations. New restrooms were installed along with LED lighting, new furnace and air-conditioning plus paint and new carpet. The upstairs foyer and restrooms also got a face-lift. Parents and church members alike were astounded with the changes, the bright new spaces, and the updated look. Our teachers were especially grateful for the

effort the church made to update the classroom space and make it more inviting.



In the spring the church hosts a brunch for the families of the preschoolers prior to the school day. Much appreciation has been expressed for the opportunity to gather for a

meal. At the graduation program for the four-year-old class the church presents a Bible story book to each student.

We are grateful for the many years of dedicated service our teachers have given, some who have been members of our congregation. We look forward to continuing to offer quality programming to our local families through our preschool.

Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville can be found at [oakgrovemc.org/home/](http://oakgrovemc.org/home/).

# Ohio Conference is hiring!

Ohio Conference is hiring two positions as it pursues its mission 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.”



1) The Administrative Coordinator and Bookkeeper will contribute to the Conference’s ability to successfully achieve its mission by:

- Being the first connection for those contacting the office via phone, mail, or online
- Providing support services to staff and leadership teams
- Setting up and processing registrations for Conference events
- Managing current and historical files
- Receiving and processing all revenue and expenses, tracking activities in financial software, filing tax forms, and creating reports that convey current fiscal vitality to leaders and congregations

Minimum qualifications include:

- A personal Christian faith and involvement in a local congregation
- One year of administrative office experience, proficiency with Microsoft Office Suite, and Zoom
- Familiarity with bookkeeping software

2) The Program and Communication Coordinator will contribute to the Conference’s ability to achieve its mission by overseeing equipping events and resources and effectively communicating about Conference to pastors and congregations. They will:

- Collaborate with the Leadership Council and Program Committee to plan events in support of Conference’s vision and mission
- Lead the Program Committee, chair meetings, and oversee the work of the committee
- Assist those with a common mission or interest to work together as ad-hoc committees
- Provide staff support to Gift Discernment Committee
- Enlist and develop capacity of volunteers for various Conference needs and events
- Oversee planning, implementation, and communication for the annual conference gathering
- Manage the Conference

website, social media presence, and print communications

- Coordinate, in cooperation with other Conference staff, the translation of Conference communication pieces into languages of all OMC congregations

Minimum qualifications include:

- A personal Christian faith and involvement in a local congregation
- At least one year of experience in leading teams and/or working with volunteers
- Experience with website management and in creating social media presence
- Generate effective communication pieces for all utilized media channels
- Proficient with Microsoft Office Suite, Adobe, and Zoom; willing to learn additional applications

Submit cover letter with resume and references to Dan Miller, interim conference minister, at [ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com](mailto:ohioconferenceminister@gmail.com).

## Two positions available:

- **Administrative Coordinator/ Bookkeeper**
- **Program and Communication Coordinator**

# Peaceful Options for Training and Careers

A project of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Peaceful Options for Training and Careers (POTC) offers young adults from across the U.S. information about non-military career, service, and training opportunities.

POTC is an initiative that works to address the issue of military recruitment on high school campuses by showing young people that there are “peaceful and meaningful alternatives to enlistment,” says Joe Roos, chair of the POTC Steering

Committee.

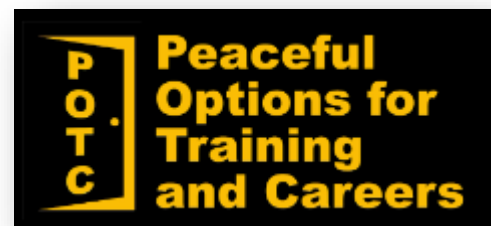
POTC has recently launched a new website that features a resource section of peaceful careers options, skills training, educational grants and scholarships, and service opportunities. There are also volunteer advisors available to help young adults find non-military options that align with their goals. All advisors undergo training and a background check.

POTC also provides information on what to

expect in the military, helping those contemplating enlistment.

POTC is funded in part by MC USAs Peace Tax Fund.

To find out more information, visit POTCs website at [explorepotc.org](https://explorepotc.org).



**“This Bible commemorates the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism by modeling a community-based approach to reading Scripture.”**

## Pre-order the Anabaptist Community Bible

MennoMedia is now accepting pre-orders for the Anabaptist Community Bible. This Bible commemorates the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism by modeling a community-based approach to reading Scripture. The text translation is the Common English Bible and is accessible to Christians from all faith traditions.

This unique study Bible includes 7,200 marginal notes, including biblical context notes from Anabaptist scholars and historical notes from the tradition. Nearly 600 Bible study groups also contributed by providing group reflections on selected scriptures. The Bible includes 40 original linocut

illustrations of the biblical story, informative essays, a 365-day Bible reading plan, and suggestions for group Bible study.

Group contributions far exceeded planners’ expectations. John Roth, project director of the Anabaptism at 500 initiative, states in an [article](#) earlier this year, “The result was a truly amazing trove of commentary—vastly more than could ever be included in the limited space of the margins.”

The Bible is available now for pre-orders with an official release date scheduled for January 21, 2025, the 500th

anniversary of Anabaptism. Pre-orders are scheduled to ship in or before January 2025. There is a Limited Edition Leather, a Soft Touch Edition, and a Hardcover Edition. Orders can be placed online at <https://shorturl.at/nyNU5>. For orders of more than 13 Bibles, call MennoMedia Customer Service at 1.800.245.7894 for custom shipping rates.





# The Soil and The Seed



Established in 2021, The Soil and The Seed Project nurtures faith through music, art, and Little Liturgies (prayer, scripture, worship) for use in the home.

The Soil and The Seed Project

is a way for individuals, families, and communities to develop new rhythms of faith as

they turn toward Jesus.

Volume 10—*Ordinary Time*—is now available. This volume includes songs, artwork, poetry and Little Liturgies for May 26–November.

The Soil and The Seed Project offers its resources free of charge to individuals and communities. This project is considered a gift to the church due to the partnership of Virginia Mennonite Missions and the generosity of individuals and communities.

To find out more information or to request a copy, visit <https://www.thesoilandtheseedproject.org/>.

## Congregational stories a part of the plan



The new Strategic Plan that was adopted by delegates at Annual Conference Assembly in March of this year states that congregational stories of “evangelism and community

participation” will be included in Ohio Conference’s communications throughout the year.

How is your congregation working in the community? Are you beginning something new or have you been involved in something for some time now? What are your successes, your

failures, your dreams?

Would you be willing to share about your experiences with the rest of Conference?

Contact Alys Short at [ohioconferencecommunications@gmail.com](mailto:ohioconferencecommunications@gmail.com) to participate. We look forward to sharing your story with others!

*Is your congregation beginning something new or have you been involved in something for a long time? Then share your story!*

## Healthy Boundaries Training

Sixty credentialed leaders participated in a Healthy Boundaries 201 training held on April 30. Led by Nancy Kauffmann, interim director of the Safe Church program of MC USA, and Jon Bohley, clinical director at SpringHaven Counseling Center in Dundee, Ohio, the training took place at

Wooster Mennonite and on Zoom.

Topics for the training included:

- The Joy of Boundaries
- Power and Vulnerability
- Living with Healthy Boundaries
- Boundaries with Internet and Social Media

All credentialed persons in Ohio Conference are required to complete Healthy Boundaries training once every three years.



## Conference Calendar

### MAY

22 Leadership Council meeting

### JUNE

13 Leadership Council meeting

23 Social Justice Sunday

### JULY

12-13 Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale, Mt. Hope

### MARCH 2025

7-8 Annual Conference Assembly, Berlin Mennonite

## Back page briefings...

### Ohio Conference

**Cast**, the podcast of Ohio Conference, continues to publish podcasts. Most recently, a series of podcasts focusing on social righteousness and kingdom justice have been released. Topics include what life for refugees in Ohio is like and food justice. Find these podcasts and more on your favorite podcast platform or visit our webpage at <https://ohiomennoniteconference.org/podcasts/>

### Girl Named Tom ,

winners of The Voice, and members of Zion Mennonite Church, will be sharing about their life and music on the Anabaptist World live stream on June 5 at 7:00 p.m. Join at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brLdzjdqcOY>.

### Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's (AMBS) Short Course Bundle

is the best deal to participate in four discussion-based online short courses to deepen understanding of Anabaptist

history, thought, witness, and practice. During the 2024-25 school year, AMBS will be offering Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible; Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology; Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture; and Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication. To learn more or to register, visit <https://shorturl.at/jyBHK>.

### Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) Zero Waste Week

is the week of June 23-29. During the months of May and June, MCC is offering a challenge to learn all about going zero waste. Then, during Zero Waste Week, the challenge is to reduce waste and even go zero waste. To learn more about this challenge and to participate, visit <https://mccthrift.com/zerowaste>.

OHIO MENNONITE  
**EVANGEL**  
*News & Views of Ohio Conference*

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