

# OHIO MENNONITE EVANGEL

*News & Views of Ohio Conference*

NOV/DEC 2024



ohiomennoniteconference.org

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 1 Thank You, Larry!
- 2 Cluster Meetings
- 3 Winter Book Study
- 5 Kenyan Christmas
- 6 Graduations
- 7 ACA
- 8 Conference Changes
- 9 Christmas Traditions
- 11 Back page briefings

## Thank You, Larry!



I write this letter on December 28, 2024, to the dedicated sisters and brothers of the Ohio Mennonite Conference, specifically to the conference leadership and pastors/congregations of northeast Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania. As I write, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have served the Ohio Conference for the past year. With only a few days remaining before my term ends, it is time to reflect on all that has made this past year so special.

When I was first invited to step into this role, the purpose was to serve as an interim Regional Pastor for one year until the leadership had more clearly defined what conference ministry would look like. In other words, the position would serve as a bridge between

the old system of Conference Minister/Regional Pastors to a fresh strategic plan that more realistically reflected the reality of the present Ohio Conference. After having been retired for four years, I was interested but not fully persuaded. My wife heard the call before I did and gave me the nudge I needed to say 'yes'. In hindsight, she probably saw it as an opportunity to get me out of the house. Regardless of how holy the call – or not – I believe it was by God's design that I stepped back into the ministry for a season.

This is what I discovered:

- A collection of pastors who love the Lord and are absolutely committed to the call they have received to serve their respective congregations. These are mostly pastors, by the way, who had also led their congregations under the pressure of a pandemic. Lest we forget, let's pray for our pastors in their joys and struggles.

- Specifically bi-vocational pastors, men and women who balance their call to serve congregations even as

they often hold full-time jobs in the community. Rarely do these pastors have the time or energy to attend beneficial Conference events. Pray for our bi-vocational pastors.

- Congregations who comprise the Ohio Mennonite Conference. It is with much gratitude that we identify the churches for the dedication they have shown in serving God in their communities. The turmoil of the past decade has left many of our congregations smaller in number and unsure of direction, yet they continue to serve the best they know how.

- Congregations (continued): there is a general weariness and lack of energy to move beyond congregational self-care. Pray for a fresh wind of the Spirit to revitalize our congregations and grant them a renewed vision for peace-making and evangelism.

Written by Larry Rohrer

Continued on page 8

## Winter Cluster Meetings

The Winter Cluster Meetings are quickly approaching. Meetings will be held on January 14, 16, 21, 23, and 27 at 6:30pm.

**January 14** at Bethel Mennonite Church in West Liberty

**January 16** at Salem Church in Waldron, Michigan

**January 21** at Crown Hill Mennonite Church in Rittman

**January 23** at Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland

**January 27** - Virtual

If your congregation would like to host a cluster meeting in fall 2025, please let Sháqñez know at [shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org).

[Register Here](#)

**Winter  
Cluster  
Meetings**



**VOL. LXXVIII, NO. 6**

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER  
2024**

Editor: Sháqñez Dickens

*Ohio Mennonite Evangel* is published six times per year by the Ohio Mennonite Conference, Box 210, Kidron OH 44636, telephone (330) 857-5421.

All material for publication should be submitted to the Ohio Conference office at Box 210, Kidron OH 44636, or via telephone: 330-857-5421, or e-mail:

[office@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:office@ohiomennoniteconference.org), one month prior to desired publication date.

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

## Conference Giving

We are so grateful for YOU - our partner congregations and delegates - who gather and engage at these events. Any gift you give today will help support our work in these projects and the many other ways Conference is ministering to our congregations. We strive at Conference to live out our mission to "gather, equip, and send our congregations to love God, love others and make disciples of Jesus Christ" - but we can't do it without your support!

[Click Here to Donate](#)

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

Moderator: Paula Snyder Belousek — [pastor@salem-mennonite.com](mailto:pastor@salem-mennonite.com)

Moderator Elect: Bill Seymour — [omcbill@gmail.com](mailto:omcbill@gmail.com)

Credentialing Representative to Leadership Council: Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach — [rachelle@millersburgmennonite.org](mailto:rachelle@millersburgmennonite.org)

Gifts Discernment Committee Chair: Glenn Nofziger — [sonnenbergpastor@gmail.com](mailto:sonnenbergpastor@gmail.com)

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

Credentialing Committee Chair: Doug King — [doug@tedrowmennonite.org](mailto:doug@tedrowmennonite.org)

Interim Conference Minister: Dan Miller — [danm@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:danm@ohiomennoniteconference.org)

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

Administrative Coordinator: Kelsey Hilty Troyer — [office@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:office@ohiomennoniteconference.org)

Bookkeeper: Lynn Miller — [bookkeeper@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:bookkeeper@ohiomennoniteconference.org)

Program Coordinator: Sháqñez Dickens — [shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org)

# Upcoming Conference Events

## Winter Book Study

This winter Ohio Conference will once again hold a Conference-wide book study using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. This year we will be studying [Brown Faces, White Spaces](#), a book by Latasha Morrison. Discussion leaders will be Greg Battle and Greg Bowman.

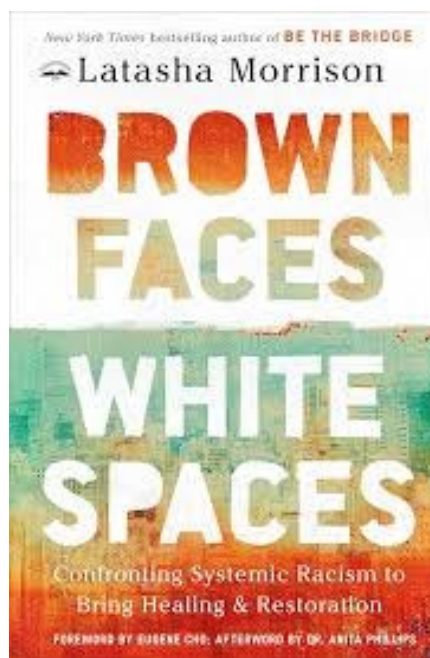
Winter Read discussion sessions will take place on Zoom on Thursday evenings, beginning January 30 and concluding on March 6. Sessions will begin at 7:00 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m. As another opportunity to connect, there will be an in-person session available for participants to join during ACA. If you would like to join the reflection session in person, you are invited to do

so (even if you haven't read the book by the time ACA comes around). Everyone is welcome.

**Registration is free.**

Participants need to purchase their own copy of the book. It is available on [Amazon](#) or any other purchasing platform the reader chooses. Audio and kindle versions are also available.

**[Register Here](#)**



CONFERENCE MINISTER MUSINGS

# Christmas Rituals

*“The rituals we had at Christmas remind me that love transforms reality.”*

With the approach of Christmas as a child we often cut out sugar cookies, baked and iced them – stars, bells, mangers, reindeer, and Santa Claus. Mom would make the frosting and add food coloring to give some variety. I’m not sure she enjoyed it, but we had fun making and eating them. As we got older Mom kept making cookies and bars for Christmas when we would all come home. I have three siblings, and we all had our favorites. Being Mom, she knew those favorites and every Christmas when we came home our favorites would be in big containers out in the breezeway: peanut butter Rice Krispie bars, chow mein candies, snicker doodles, chocolate crinkle cookies, plus of course cut out cookies. As I said, I’m not sure she enjoyed it, but it was one way she expressed her love for us every year.

Mom died over 20 years ago. My sibs and I have shared her various recipes. We sometimes bring our favorites to a holiday meal. Doing that brings a special warm memory to our hearts.

When I was in middle school, we started making candles as Christmas presents for teachers, church friends and co-workers. Mom was an elementary school teacher, and Dad was a pastor turned social worker. We made three-inch and six-inch tall pillars candles. There were tall pillars in the shape of stars. Mom learned how to add fluffy texture to the

outside of the candle, like snow. There were white and green and red and blue candles, with different scents added too. I thought we were having fun but later found out we did it because it was cheap, and we did not have much money. Mom disliked it, but it was a way of expressing appreciation to others. Once there was some more money, all that candle-making stuff was gone! (None of us make candles now, either.)

Reading the Advent and Christmas passages this year, I wish for the usual warm and fuzzy feelings associated with Christmas. But they feel sparse to me this year. I do not see much peace or goodwill toward one another in the world we inhabit together. The rituals we had at Christmas remind me that love transforms reality. God is looking to transform our world – to reconcile all things in Christ. Even when we can’t see it, it’s important that we embody the way of Jesus, speak for justice, and find beauty in truth. Yet transformation, new life, is a gift. As I read the familiar scriptures this year, I wonder if God enjoys all that is part of reconciling all things. Maybe not. Maybe Mom’s examples of doing things out of love even when she disliked them, is a parable of God’s own posture toward us. Can that be? I wonder.

Written by Dan Miller





# African Christmas Tradition: Kenya

The Christmas season is honored in Kenya like any other place in the world except in Ethiopia which uses a different calendar. It is a season that people prepare their souls for the coming (birth) of the Messiah: the prince of peace and it's also a season where the family comes together in their Matrimonial home. In Kenya, people who work in the big cities( Nairobi, Mombasa.....) also have a home in the village that is within the family property or very close to the family. Sons build their houses within the property and during Christmas, most of the people travel home to be with the rest of the family( parents and siblings) and it's also a time when grandparents spend time with their grandchildren. The mass travel from Nairobi (the capital) happens between 20-24th December and during that time, the prices of the Bus

Tickets goes high because of the demand and sad enough! It's also a season of road accidents since the buses are rushing back and forth to make more money from the mass movement from the cities and this is the time when a driver will drive on a new route at night and of course accidents. Sometimes it gets worse that the country counts at least a tragic accident everyday (very sad moments).

As people prepare for Christmas, they will buy new outfits that include clothes and shoes and if you want to make a child happy on a Christmas day, then you have to get him/her new shoes and clothes for Christmas. Food is also important, a Christmas without special food is not Christmas and the special food is slaughtering a rooster and making Chapati( fried flat

dough). People have the pressure of buying outfits, roosters and wheat flour. We do slaughter Roosters during Christmas and Easter and This makes me wonder why a rooster must be slaughtered in these two big Christian events.

Christmas Eve: Different churches have different programs for both Christmas eve and Christmas day. For the Mennonites, we do have an overnight program for Christmas Eve that runs from 8 pm - 4 am the next day and it's attended by the youths. During the program, they start with prayers that last at least for one hour, followed by praise and worship songs followed by a short sermon about the birth of Jesus and it should end before midnight. At Midnight, people will sing praises while playing the musical instruments filled with joy saying that The savior

*"It is a season that people prepare their souls for the coming (birth) of the Messiah: the prince of peace and it's also a season where the family comes together..."*

Continued on page 10



# OMC Graduations to Celebrate

Conference is thrilled to celebrate the academic achievements of the members of the community. Please join us in celebrating Alysa Short and Sháqñez Dickens on their graduations.

## Alysa Graduates from Journey

**Alysa Short** of Pettisville, Ohio, joined the Journey program in the fall of 2021. She's involved in preaching, serving on committees, teaching Sunday school for all ages, and planning and leading worship for her home congregation, [PEACE Mennonite Fellowship](#) in Archbold, Ohio — a congregation of Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

Her mentor in the Journey program was **Sue Short** of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio — a congregation of Ohio Mennonite Conference.

"Journey was a wonderful program to learn, explore and deepen not only my biblical understanding but also my pastoral leadership skills," she reflected. "I was allowed to question, ponder, doubt and wrestle with new and old concepts while also practicing the skills taught. The Weekend Learning Events provided time for reflection and learning from others. But I will always maintain that the best part of the Journey program is the mentor-mentee relationship. Having someone to walk with me on the journey was so meaningful. This relationship is what really makes the entire Journey program what it is."



Short is married to **Mark Short**, and they have two children.

This article was pulled from the AMBS website and linked [here](#).

## Sháqñez Graduates from IWU



On behalf of the Leadership Council, I want to extend heartfelt congratulations to Sháqñez Dickens, our Program and Communication Coordinator on her graduation from Indiana Wesleyan University with a Master's in Organizational Leadership! This significant accomplishment is evidence of her dedication, perseverance, and commitment to learning. We admire her hard

work and dedication. Please join us in congratulating Sháqñez on this outstanding achievement.

Written by Paula Snyder  
Belousek, Moderator

# ACA

Did you know that ACA is for **EVERYONE** in your congregation? As you are making your preparations to attend, please be sure to share this event with the members in your congregation.

ACA will take place on March 7-8 at Berlin Mennonite Church.

Our theme verse is 1 Corinthians 3:11.

The theme is **Foundation to Future**.

In looking at Anabaptism at 500, we look at the firm foundation that has been built in the past and how that foundation will pave the way to strengthen our faith for the future.

Ohio Mennonite Conference has secured Shannon Dycus, Jonathan Swartz, and John Roth as speakers for ACA. John Roth will kick off the gathering with speaking to how the past has created a firm foundation for Anabaptist faith over the last 500 years. Shannon will be

speaking to how the foundation built in the past will impact the future spiritual and social practices of Anabaptism. Connecting to our future, Jonathan will provide elements of how restorative justice plays a role in the Anabaptist faith in the present and future.

To learn more about our incredible speaker line up, please click the links below for their bios.

## FOUNDATION to Future



[Shannon Dycus](#)

Vice President for Student Affairs, Equity, and Belonging at EMU



[Jonathan Swartz](#)

Associate Dean of Students at EMU



[John Roth](#)

Professor of History at Goshen & a Contributor for the Anabaptist Study Bible

# Thank You, Larry! (cont'd)

- Conference leadership, including staff, who have been called out of our congregations to use their gifts in a broader capacity. In spite of the extra work load, they carry on out of their love for Jesus and the church. Pray that our leaders be given clear minds and open hearts to continue as the vision-carriers of the Ohio Conference.

With much love I must say that while my term has come to an end, the work carries on. For the church is Christ's church. The work is Christ's work. And we all serve the best we know how by our recognition of the power of the Spirit at work within us. The church is in good hands, and I look forward to the ways Ohio Mennonite Conference will live out God's greatest Commandments and Jesus' Great Commission.

Continued from page 1

## Conference Ministry Changes

Larry Rohrer completes his interim conference ministry role with Ohio Mennonite Conference at the end of December 2024. With the decision not to fill the half-time associate conference minister position at this time due to limited finances, there will be one full-time minister. Staff transition, especially when there is a decrease in staffing, can create confusion about who to call with questions. Here is a simple guide we hope can help.

Contact Kelsey Hilty Troyer, administrative coordinator, if you need help knowing where to turn. It's never wrong to contact her at [office@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:office@ohiomennoniteconference.org) or 330-857-5421. She can help you get connected!

Contact Dan Miller, interim conference minister for

- pastoral transitions,
- pastor and congregation evaluations,
- credentialing,
- consulting with congregational leaders,
- the Journey program or
- your interest in becoming a pastor, etc. Contact Dan at [danm@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:danm@ohiomennoniteconference.org) or 574-238-1883.

Contact Sháqñez Dickens, program and communications coordinator, for

- programs such as Annual Conference Assembly, Pastor/Spouse Retreat, Women in Leadership Retreat, etc.
- print and electronic communication. (She is always looking for congregational stories about engagement in the community! Contact Sháqñez at [shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org](mailto:shaquez@ohiomennoniteconference.org).)

Conference leaders are exploring additional ways to support pastors and congregations focus on loving God and neighbor, and making disciples. Watch for other updates in coming months.



# Christmas Traditions at Salem Mennonite-Elida

*“This year our youth have taken the lead in planning, leading and preparing our visuals for the Advent-Christmas season.”*

Everyone loves a beautifully decorated church for Christmas. For many years, an older couple oversaw hanging the garlands in the sanctuary and setting out decorations around the church. Once they were no longer able to fulfill this role, we started an all church “Hanging of the Greens” party, following worship the Sunday before Advent. The whole church is invited to share a simple lunch together and then assist in decorating the sanctuary and the foyer. One of the most coveted roles for youth is bold enough to climb the ladders to hang the garlands.

We also have a large wooden nativity set that features the three wisemen. Instead of placing the set together, on the first Sunday of Advent, the Wisemen are placed by the front door. Throughout the season leading up to Epiphany, the Wisemen move ever closer to the Christ child. The younger children enjoy helping to move the Wisemen as well as coming to church the following Sunday to see where they have travelled on their journey.

This year our youth have taken the lead in planning, leading and preparing our visuals for

the Advent-Christmas season. We are using Worship Design Studio’s series, On the Way to Bethlehem, where the congregation is guided in worship to a new geographical location each week. Our youth have taken this responsibility seriously and have done a beautiful job, leading our congregation each Sunday. While this is not a regular tradition, it may well become one because of the congregation’s strong response and affirmation.

-Written by Paula Snyder  
Belousek



## African Christmas Tradition: Kenya (cont'd)

has been born to us, the praises are mixed with prayers that can be very personal and people welcome the messiah into their souls and life. This can last for one hour and the rest of the night is all about singing and encouragement till 4 am.

Christmas Day: The big day, everyone wakes up to a warm Chapati and Thick milk tea. God bless our Mums and sisters who wake up early to make breakfast. After breakfast, everyone dresses up for Christmas and goes to church as a family. Christmas day is a special service with the biggest

number and people give special offerings as thanksgiving. Some people only come to church on a Christmas day because of the nature of their job while others are just too lazy and only show up on Christmas day. After the Church service, people will go home for lunch and then come back to the shopping centre to hang out with Childhood friends and relatives that they only meet once in a year. So Christmas is a day in the year that people meet their friends. Some will invite friends for dinner at their place where they will roast a goat and hang out around a campfire having long

conversations about Childhood memories.

For the church, Christmas is a special day where people give special offerings that range from money, to farm produce and livestock (a calf, goat, sheep, and chicken). It's a time when people give Thanks to the Lord for keeping them throughout the year.

Merry Christmas!  
Krismasi Njema (Swahili)

-Written by Elvis O. Otieno  
(IVEPer from Kenya)

Continued from page 5

## Wooster Mennonite Feels the Spirit

Each year for Christmas Eve, Wooster Mennonite serves a meal, open to the community, followed by a candlelight service. During the meal, guests are welcomed to hats and gloves that have been collected during the fall. As I walked through the fellowship hall, I was reminded of the kindness that shines through our community even during the darkest of seasons. Tradition aside, to see the smiles and

Kindness that was ever so present filled my heart.

One sight that I focused on was a member of the church taking the time to sit with a member of the community. This member was struggling to cut his food so without hesitation, assistance was offered. It wasn't just the act of offering to help, it was the soft peaceful way in which conversation ensued them both as if they had been friends for a

lifetime. It was in that moment that I was reminded of why we serve and live to spread the word of the Lord. We are here to spread love even in the most simplest of ways. To experience that is a blessing in and of itself.

Happy Holidays!

-Written by Sháqñez Dickens

# Conference Calendar

## JANUARY

- 14 Bethel in West Liberty
- 16 Salem Church in Waldron, MI
- 21 Crown Hill in Rittman
- 23 Lee Heights in Cleveland
- 27 Virtual Meeting

## MARCH

- 7-8 ACA at Berlin Mennonite Church

## MAY

- tbd Credentialed Leaders Bible Study

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

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