

What's Next?

Delegate Responses

Ohio Conference Annual Conference Assembly

March 4, 2023

The following responses came from delegates almost immediately after learning that the resolution to disaffiliate from MC USA did not receive the 2/3 majority required to pass. Immediately after hearing the results, all delegates were asked to sit in silence for two full minutes. Following the silence, each delegate had time individually to write their responses to the question, "What is next?" before sharing with a conversation partner. After sharing with a partner, the teams returned to their tables of eight to share their thoughts. A recorder at each of the 19 tables wrote the responses on large sheets of paper to be posted and shared with all in attendance.

The responses provide valuable guidance to the Leadership Team in planning the next steps of the Strategic Planning Process.

All the responses come from individual Ohio Conference delegates. The responses have been sorted loosely by category.

Attitudes as Ohio Conference moves forward:

- Be together, united in the same goal. Support and trust the leadership team.
- Keep loving each other, keep doing the missional work we've been called to do.
- Love and support people in their own points of view
- Stick together and focus on what we have in common.
- Acknowledge our differences.
- Choosing to live with difference in a peaceful productive loving way.
- The spirit of ACA was loving and respectful.
- The delegates have spoken in a peaceable manner with respect for each other.
- Let us be extra-supportive of our conference leaders.
- Continue support of others and affirm their differing thoughts and opinions and feelings.
- We can still be together even though we may disagree on this issue.
- Understanding of churches who will undergo further discernment.

Actions of Faithfulness:

- Continue to listen to each other, commit to reading scripture and thinking about what it means to be a community of believers.
- Put focus on Christ.
- God's will is being done.
- We must continue to be the church, including our respect for scripture and the confession of faith.
- Prayer and self-examination
- Pray for guidance peace.
- Stay true to the confession of faith and maintain autonomy.
- Study scripture together.
- Continue to live in the presence of God.
- Keep Jesus at the center.
- Continue having church.
- Continue being Church.
- Continue being a good guest at God's banquet table.

- Congregational day-to-day continues as is
- Pray
- Pray
- Pray
- Prayer and fasting
- Get back to what we are required to do: Love mercy, do justice, walk humbly with our God.
- Continue doing as you have always done (Daniel 6).

Calls for Focus on Mission:

- It felt like the theme of the love of God resonated here at ACA. Let's keep exploring that.
- Live it where we're at.
- Ohio Conference should move on to other Kingdom work.
- Focus on our local church and outreach and church members.
- Focus on needs.
- Start with the vision of Ohio Conference and move out from there.
- Redirection where can we put our energy.
- Big imaginations
- Missional conference
- Work on Ohio Conference mission and Jesus commission to us
- We need fresh input about how to participate in Ohio Conference missional initiatives.
- Do interesting things.
- Follow our confession/ mission with prayer. Be a part of solutions- not more problems.
- Go out to communities and focus on being Jesus.
- Focus on our efforts on what we're for Ohio Conference mission. Congregational missions
- Our mission remains the same: love God and love our neighbor.
- Gathered and sent - get back to it.
- Use church resources to reach out to others in need sharing knowledge with the conference to build relationships and energy to congregations.
- Relationship building within congregations and conference churches with focus on mission discipleship.

Process- Attending to Emotions and Relationships

- Create space for emotional response. Move toward unity and shared energy.
- Not rush into what's next. Need creative way forward.
- Church-to-church visitation teams to share what about what is valuable in Ohio Conference with each other.
- Be patient. Sit with everyone.
- Dialogue with congregation members who disagree with the vote.
- Continue the dialogue with churches disappointed with results.
- Use our own conflict resolution resources (Connexus)
- Ohio Conference leaders visit every church to promote unity.
- Encourage one another congregation to congregation.
- Work at relationship building.
- Stop, listen, make good use of tears.
- Not run away. Pray to accept what is not comfortable.
- Move and lean into our strengths.
- Deal with disappointment. Pray and move forward.
- Relationships drive our discernment.

- Affirm and focus on our points of agreement.
- Stop and take a break to get perspective
- Put this in the past and move on to other things.
- Time to settle, work through feelings, reconnect.
- Initiate connection with new stories.

Process- Clarifying Facts

- Focus on our Anabaptist teachings and values. Peace, Justice, foundational topics that brought Anabaptist together.
- Our congregations still have autonomy.
- Decision to opt out of MC USA (Ohio Conference option)
- Ohio Conference should use this opportunity to evaluate its relationship with MC USA in a positive way.
- Is there something we can do within the construct of MC USA to make both sides feel heard and more comfortable.
- Leaving Mennonite Church USA but staying part of Ohio Conference is still a choice for a congregation.
- Clarify reasons to leave Mennonite Church USA
- Link non-MC USA Ohio Conference churches for conversation on what this means.
- Continue. Reiterate autonomy and Ohio Conference position.
- Understanding of relationship with MC USA
- Make sure churches know what they would lose if they walked away.
- Have churches disassociate with MC USA but stay with Ohio Conference

Process- Encouraging Participation

- Reflection, meditation, prayer for months.
- Explain the process.
- Increase and encourage congregational involvement of delegates and pastoral leadership in relationship to conference.
- Keep delegates and congregations engaged on how to best process.
- Do it together both congregationally and with conference.
- Forward
- Continued dialogue as Ohio Conference and churches.
- Discernment is hard work. It takes time and effort.
- Share results. look at other affiliations.
- Conference needs to continue conversation.
- Give leadership time to plan and work. Now must start the next process.
- Process and pray.
- Praying for guidance
- Asking Ohio conference for clarity of what is next.

Process- Work to be done.

- Ask what does God want us to learn? Ourselves, Ohio Mennonite Conference, MC USA congregations
- Focus on additional work before us. Constitution. Structure of conference. Potential name change.
- Finding a common project (my coins count, imagine new ideas, relief sale events).
- Work toward addressing and resolving underlying issues.
- Resources in place to talk about issues.
- Discuss and resolve tension.

- Dialogue with MC USA
- Be supportive of next generation.
- Discuss mystery of human sexuality without being consumed by negative emotions and fear.
- Open up conversation about inclusion
- Visit and see and keep talking with other conferences
- Continue to explore connections with other groups.
- Slow it down, look at options to fill the needs of our church. Don't be reactionary.
- What's next is what's been - status quo

Need for congregations to think through their response to the vote:

- Speak to the process (of the vote on resolution). Speak to the facts:
 - Fair, well-thought-out process
 - Civil and well-articulated viewpoints
 - Required 66.66% approval to proceed for strong majority support.
 - Allowed for time to reflect and discern the recent events before deciding how to proceed.
 - There was no pressure to vote one way over another.
 - Fair and balanced.
- Individual and congregational response
- Congregations should be dialoguing about what this means for them.
- Congregational discernment through scripture reading and prayer.
- Congregations can do the best work that's needed to help create a healthy Ohio Conference whatever size it is.
- Take pulse of congregation
- Internal processing
- Talk it over.
- Get understanding of what happened.
- We will need to have conversation and process our congregation's desires.
- Discernment at the congregational level on what now
- Report back to the congregations including the process was conducted in love.
- Reaffirm congregation commitment to traditional view.
- Process of sharing and discerning how to move forward with congregation.
- Congregational discernment
- Not sure if we can stay with Ohio Conference if they are part of MC USA
- Focus on congregational unity.

Other

- Not sure
- Don't know.
- What did I miss? What did I not understand?
- Not sure. Still processing