

Conference Minister Annual Report 2015

I am using the Job Description for Conference Minister as a basis for my annual report. The job description is in green text. The ways in which I have worked this past year to fulfill my job are in black text.

Job description for Conference Minister

AMC's Conference Minister will lead and coordinate the activities of the conference to strengthen the nurture, worship, and mission of conference pastors and congregations. To do this, the Conference Minister will work closely with the Leadership Council and other groups so that the conference and its congregations may more fully join in God's redemptive activity in the world.

Duties

A. With pastors

- Become acquainted with conference pastors, understanding their strengths as well as areas needing growth and development.

I meet with pastors regionally every other month. These are occasions for me to learn to know the pastors better, to get caught up on the issues they are facing, what is bringing them joy, and what is bringing them challenge. Once a year, we meet for the annual Spring Study, and once a year, a Pastors Retreat is held. Delegates meetings and Pastor Peer are also times for me to be with pastors. All of these times are places where I learn to know pastors' strengths as well as growing edges. In addition to these regular times, I meet with pastors at their request. This past year was the first time we required pastors to fill out the "Growth and Accountability Plan". This is a tool that encourages the pastor to do some self-evaluation and create goals for him or herself for the coming year. In this coming second year of implementation, I hope to use these plans more deliberately to help pastors pay better attention to the goals they have set for themselves. Every meeting, be it a group meeting, congregational meeting, or one-on-one, is an opportunity to learn to know pastors better. The more I know a person, the more I understand his or her strengths and areas needing growth and further development.

- Listen to pastors' concerns and joys and provide understanding and challenge as necessary.

I meet regularly with pastors at regional meetings. During these meetings, I invite pastors to share what's happening in their congregations as well as in their personal lives. Following our time of sharing, we pray for one another. I am also available to pastors on an individual basis as needed. Pastors have contacted me through email, phone (both office and cell phone), text, and face-to-face, requesting some time. I try to meet these requests as quickly as I possibly can whenever they come up. In these times of meeting, I certainly hope I am providing understanding as well as challenge, when needed.

- Facilitate the development of training and professional renewal experiences for conference pastors.

This past year I coordinated a meeting with Terry Shue, Director of Leadership Development for Mennonite Church USA and pastors. During this day-long meeting, Terry led a workshop on *Discernment: The Work of the Church*. This workshop covered the differences between debate, dialogue, and discernment, and gave us a look at best practices of faith communities listening together to capture the heart of God's will for their lives together.

Pastors Retreat was held October 10-12, 2014. This retreat took place at Laurelville, and was a time for pastors and spouses to relax together, laugh, rest and be renewed. We heard stories of call throughout the weekend. On Saturday morning, two separate meetings took place, with pastors sharing together, and spouses sharing and supporting each other in the unique situations, joys and challenges they have as spouse to the pastor.

The annual Spring Study was held April 27-30, 2015. Perry Yoder led us in a study of Leviticus. One of the things he taught us is that Leviticus is, first of all, a book about God's grace, and that law comes after grace. Plans are being made for next year's Spring Study. Information will be sent to pastors when we know who are instructor will be and when it will take place.

Besides these three meetings, I send out information to pastors regarding such things as Eastern Mennonite Seminary's School for Leadership Training, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's Pastors Week, and other classes, workshops, and seminars that would be pertinent to pastors as I am made aware of them.

- Meet regularly with pastors on a regional basis.

As reported above, I do meet regularly with pastors on a regional basis. This past year, I met with the Eastern Regional pastors once a quarter. This was a pattern of meeting that they had established before I became conference minister. Sadly, at our last meeting, we did not schedule a "next" meeting, knowing that a number of these congregations would be leaving Allegheny. At this writing, some, but not all of these leavings have taken place. We will need to evaluate these meetings at a later time, when we know better who will be available to meet. Currently, I meet with Casselman Valley, Johnstown, and Western Regions every other month. These meetings alternate with Pastor Peer which is open to any Allegheny Mennonite Conference pastor from any of the four regions.

B. With congregations

- Become acquainted with each conference congregation, developing an awareness of both the strengths and the areas of weaknesses in each.

I have completed my goal to visit each conference congregation to worship with them. I continue to meet with congregations for worship as well as for other kinds of meetings. Usually, this is initiated by the pastor, but sometimes I initiate visits as well. Many congregations have been visited more than once due to various things going on in the life of the congregation. These times of visiting are very helpful in becoming aware of congregational strengths and

weaknesses. I also learn about congregations as I meet regularly with pastors. In my visits, I have been impressed with the variety of worship styles that we have, as well as the spiritual vitality I find in the people of the congregation.

- Offer tools and training to assist congregations in their growth and development.

I keep pastors and congregations informed regarding class offerings and resources that are available through Mennonite Church USA. On June 2, 2015, I helped to organize a day for pastors and other interested persons to meet with David Dupuis to talk about Pennsylvania's new child protection laws in the morning, and to meet with Ervin Stutzman in the afternoon to prepare for Mennonite Church USA's bi-annual convention in Kansas City.

- Give assistance in times of pastoral transitions in securing, interviewing, and calling prospective candidates.

A number of pastors have sought my council as they have considered whether God was inviting them into a new ministry, or into retirement. I welcome these conversations and count it a privilege to be able to journey with pastors in these times of transition. When a congregation finds itself in need of a pastor, I help them through the process by providing information on next steps, orienting their pastoral search committee to the process, and then working with the search committee to provide them with potential candidates, and offering encouragement along the way. When a potential candidate is in need of credentialing, I arrange for an interview with the credentialing team, orient the credentialing team, and participate in the interview. When a pastoral search has been completed, I work with the congregation to find a time for installation/credentialing and, when the day comes, officiate over this portion of the worship service.

- Participate in congregational/pastoral reviews.

I have pointed review committees to resources for pastoral/congregational reviews on the Mennonite Church USA website, offering advice about how to use these resources as needed, and participate in the review itself as appropriate to the needs of the congregation. Not all congregations in Allegheny Mennonite Conference do reviews, and of those that do, not all have asked for my assistance. But when I know a review is happening, I become involved as needed.

- Advocate for the pastor in areas of salary; encourage sabbatical, study leaves, as needed.

Particularly when a congregation is beginning a relationship with a new pastor, it is easy to enter into conversation with the congregation regarding salary, sabbaticals, and other items pertinent to the covenant that is being formed between the pastor and congregation. I have talked about the benefits of and intentions for sabbaticals with several leaders of congregations to help them understand why they should be considering a sabbatical for their pastors. I have talked with several pastors this year about their sabbatical plans. While not a study leave, I have encouraged some pastors to take specific classes to aid them in areas needing growth throughout the year.

- Find ways to offer resources and help in times of congregational crises and tensions.

While I don't relish times of crises and tension, I am certainly ready and willing to look for ways and resources to help at such a time. I have had numerous conversations with people and

congregations who are currently uncomfortable in their relationship with Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

- Serve as spokesperson, along with moderator/moderator elect, in conversations with groups seeking affiliation with Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

In the beginning of conversation with the Bhutanese-Nepali Church of Pittsburgh, I spent many hours on the phone or in person with their pastor as we discerned if this was the group they wanted to affiliate with or not. Since their affiliation with our conference, I serve on the support team for this church plant. I was also in numerous conversations with Shalom: a Peace Church of Brother Francis and Sister Clare before they became a church plant of Allegheny Mennonite Conference. I continue to stay involved with these plants, particularly with the Bhutanese-Nepali Church. I had conversation with a representative of a group that wants to start a church plant in Pittsburgh, but is affiliated with another conference. In addition to this conversation, I spoke with the conference minister of the other conference, the moderator and moderator-elect of Allegheny, and the Allegheny pastors who are in Pittsburgh.

C. With conference

- Facilitate the development and processing of vision for the conference.

This past year, any thinking about the future has been largely consumed by work with the Reconciliation Discernment Committee (RDC), and then with Leadership Council's work, together with the delegates, that grew out of the RDC's work. This coming year we will need to discover where God is leading us in the new reality that is Allegheny Mennonite Conference following the delegate's decision that happened on March 7, 2015.

- Provide for the interviewing and credentialing of conference pastors.

Together with the Leadership Council, I have set up a credential team to replace the previous four regional teams. I send out appropriate materials to the credentialing team as the need arises so that they can properly prepare for the interviews, arrange for time and place for the interviews to take place, participate in the interviews, and then communicate decisions made by these teams to the appropriate persons. In the past year, David Swanson of Pittsburgh, Ben Wideman of University, and Lisa Sayre of Shalom have been licensed toward ordination. Matt Pritchard of Shalom and Keith Yoder of Kaufman have been approved for ordination. As I write, we are looking for dates for these ordinations to take place. We have received five more requests from congregations for ordination for their pastors. These five are all at various stages of completion.

- Maintain records of credentials and congregational information.

Records are kept internally within filing cabinets in my office. I regularly update our conference's listing on Mennonite Church USA's data base. I also maintain our congregational listing on Mennonite Church USA's data base, as well as list pastoral openings when they arise.

- Provide leadership and encouragement for the development of conference regions as requested.

At this point, the focus has been on pastors regional meetings.

- Participate in meetings of the Leadership Council, delegate assemblies, and other meetings as called by the moderators.

I have participated fully in Celebration 2014; the Sept. 18, 2014 and April 23, 2015 Leadership Council meetings, Jan. 16-18 Leadership Council Retreat; the November 1, 2014 and March 7, 2015 Faith and Life Gathering, and meetings with our moderator and moderator-elect as called for by our moderator.

- Serve as staff for the Leadership Council.

I have been asked to do a variety of things as staff for Leadership Council, including (but not limited to!) serving as staff for the Reconciliation Discernment Committee, and keeping up portions of Allegheny Mennonite Conference's website. To the best of my ability, I have carried out all that has been asked of me by Leadership Council.

- Oversee the work of other conference staff.

I meet regularly with Kathy and Joy in formal staff meetings. We also talk freely of our work when we are in the office together. In this way, I have a good picture of the work conference staff is doing.

- Serve as spokesperson for the conference in relation to media requests.

I do this as the need arises. Most recently, I spoke with reporters from The Atlantic, The Mennonite, and Mennonite World Review following our March 7, 2015 Faith and Life Gathering.

- Serve as conference representative in legal activities.

Thankfully, conference has not been involved in any legal proceedings that needed my attention during the 2014-2015 year.

D. With the denomination

- Serve as a liaison between the conference and Mennonite Church USA.

I am in regular conversation with our Denominational Minister, Nancy Kauffmann. I try to keep congregations informed of items that come from the denominational offices, as appropriate by passing the information along to pastors. I keep Mennonite Church USA informed regarding our conference through our denominational minister and through conference minister, Constituency Leaders Council and Atlantic North East Conference meetings.

- Develop and maintain working relationship with other conference and district ministers in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Conference ministers meet for a break out session during the Constituency Leaders Council, and have an annual Conference Minister retreat. I attend both. During the Conference Minister Retreat, we also meet with the Area Church Ministers of Mennonite Church Canada. These meetings are extremely valuable for developing and maintaining working relationships. I have experienced these meetings to be both times of learning as well as supportive. I appreciate the friendship and wisdom that I find as we gather.

- Serve as conference representative to the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) and delegate meetings of Mennonite Church USA.

I attend Constituency Leaders Council's two-times-per-year, 2 1/2 day meetings. I will be attending Kansas City and serving as a table leader during the delegate sessions this year.

- Provide feedback to the denomination through consultations, surveys, and written reports as requested.

Periodically, conference ministers are asked to attend conference phone calls, often to receive information and provide feedback. Sometimes we are asked to read and respond to emails. I write reports about Allegheny Mennonite Conference for CLC meetings and provide other reports as needed. Recently, I responded to a survey all Conference Ministers were asked to complete regarding Mennonite Church USA and conference/congregational relationships in regard to the LGBTQ community.

- Serve as conference representative to regional denominational gatherings, such as meetings of Atlantic North East Conferences (ANEC).

Due to the rescheduling of both ANEC meetings this year, I was unable to attend. Lawrence Brenneman did attend these meetings on our behalf, and has briefed me as to the nature of these two meetings.

E. With other religious bodies

- Represent the conference in ecumenical discussions and activities.
- Interact and cooperate with other middle judicatory leaders serving in geographical areas in which conference churches are located.

I attend a Middle Judicatory meeting twice a year. Also attending this meeting are persons from the Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ, United Church of Christ, and Roman Catholic denominations. During these meetings I represent our conference, as well as interact and cooperate with other middle judicatory leaders. I believe this speaks to both of the above pearls.

Qualifications

I will not respond to the qualifications or employment portions of this job description in this report, but I have included it for your benefit. As to the accountability portion, I will say that we have implemented a growth and accountability document for our pastors, and have promised that I will not ask them to do anything that I am not willing to do. Therefore, I completed the accountability plan for myself and have turned it in to the moderator. I will also be supplying a copy to the Leadership Council as well as share it with the pastors of AMC. I write reports, or give oral reports as requested by the moderator for Leadership Council as well as to delegates.

We certainly face challenges as a conference, and I continue to learn and grow as a conference minister, but overall, I find joy in serving our Lord as I serve you.

The following are some of the qualifications and gifts Allegheny Mennonite Conference looks for in the person it hires as Conference Minister:

1. A person of vision for the future of the conference, its congregations, its pastors, and its leadership.
2. An Anabaptist in faith, values, and practice who is willing to join and participate in an Allegheny Conference congregation if not already a member.
3. A person with seminary training or one willing to receive graduate training after being hired.
4. One who has experience as a pastor in a Mennonite Church USA congregation.
5. A person with skills in team-building and leadership development.
6. Someone able to model leadership skills for conference pastors and other leaders.
7. A person with a good balance of people skills and evaluative skills.
8. A person with skills in maintaining, evaluating, and changing structures as deemed appropriate in cooperation with conference leadership.
9. One who knows the value of self-care and actively participates in personal and professional growth opportunities.

Accountability

1. The Conference Minister will be responsible to the Leadership Council through the moderator.
2. The Conference Minister will prepare reports to conference delegates as requested by the Leadership Council.
3. The Conference Minister will be evaluated mid-way through each term of service by the Executive Committee, acting on behalf of the Leadership Council.

Employment

1. Salary and benefits for AMC's Conference Minister will follow the guidelines for pastors and conference ministers of Mennonite Church USA.

Length of employment will be by three-year terms unless negotiated differently by the candidate and the Leadership Council.