

Letter to the congregations of Allegheny Mennonite Conference

As the concluding edition of the Miscellany under my hand, I am sending this letter to the seventeen congregations of AMC. I will have served exactly eight years, as I end my time on June 30, 2024. I accepted your call to serve as conference minister and began July 1, 2016.



When I arrived to the conference minister position, Allegheny was eighteen congregations soon to be twelve. Our primary effort during my first two years was to discern whether we could viably remain one of the active conferences of Mennonite Church USA. Beginning as early as 2001, and as a direct result of the merger of the (Old) Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church into the new MC USA, congregations made decisions to depart from Allegheny. In subsequent years, disagreements over the full inclusion of persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ became central to the stated reasons for departure. What had been some thirty-six congregations working together in the 1990s, was developing into a smaller group with a distinctive vision.

In 2016, Allegheny began seeking a clearer identity to become a diverse conference, recognizing the congregation as the locus of authority, while still having ministerial credentials held at the conference level as defined in the MC USA bylaws. Membership at the congregational level would take on a new posture as congregations would determine to be siblings together, but not impose uniform practice on one another. A new song would guide us: *Jesus-centered. Collaborative. Committed to place-based ministry.* We began to sing in harmony, not requiring unison on every issue.

A core group of pastors gave voice to the new vision. We sought counsel from other conferences experiencing similar challenges, particularly receiving assistance from Central District and Indiana-Michigan conferences. It was and continues to be a rich time of emerging work. When other conferences and congregations began to see what we were doing together, we began a new chapter of growth. I see Allegheny as offering a voice of refreshment into the ongoing journey of the denomination. I trust that we are learning to operate in this new mode with both courage and humility, in the Spirit of Jesus. If it is not inappropriate, I am proud of the work that we, our congregations and pastors, have accomplished together. I am further gratified by the recent collection of gifts for our newest member – *the exchange*. Without giving too much away, *the exchange* will receive a significant gift from conference congregations during our Celebration event in August. I appreciate the willingness to give out of the abundance that we have received from the legacy of the International Guest House.

I expect that Allegheny will continue to play a significant role in congregational, conference and denominational life going forward. Our new conference minister is well gifted for expanding and honing the work we have been doing. I will honor the expectations of outgoing conference ministers and refrain from engagement with the conference for the next year, at a minimum. I will keep my membership with Scottdale Mennonite Church for the near term, with Allegheny holding my credentials and giving me the opportunity to see what might be next for my journey.

Special thanks to Kathy Holsopple and Joy Cotchen for being colleagues together in our work. And I once again share with you that I am deeply grateful for your support these last months, with the passing of Becky last October. I have been privileged to serve with you. May God continue to lead us in paths of joy and courage as we serve our risen Lord.