

# Get to Know MSMC Leadership Board

## Meet Conference Moderator Ryan Koch: A game-playing, peacemaking, self-described nerd

By Amy Zimbelman



Anyone who knows Ryan Koch knows this: the man enjoys having fun. With a ready laugh, Ryan understands the value of play: playing board games, card games, playing with his family (especially his 4-year-old daughter), playing with his husky, and watching his Ohio sports teams play.

“I think life is meant to be enjoyed; it’s not something you’re supposed to take too seriously,” Ryan says. “There’s a constant push in our culture to always be productive and efficient. But that’s not what gaming is about. It doesn’t matter who you are [when you’re gaming]—there’s no pressure to be anyone other than yourself.”

But don’t misunderstand him; he doesn’t only find joy in gaming. In fact, one of his greatest joys is the serious study of peace theology, which drew his interest in 2011 while at Malone University, a Quaker school.

“Three weeks into my college career, 9/11 happened. The experience of watching the Quakers respond so differently to the aftermath of 9/11 got me interested in peace theology,” he explains. “I saw firsthand the Quaker understanding of nonviolence and loving enemies and reconciliation.”

That interest in peace theology was one thing that led him to study at Duke Divinity and attend Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, where he discerned a call to become a Mennonite pastor. From there, he pastored at Peace Mennonite Church in Dallas for nine years. He served as a leader in other ways as well in Dallas, including as board president of the Dallas Peace and Justice Center and co-teacher of a class on peace theology at Southern Methodist University.

Then in 2015, Ryan received a Lilly grant to explore a related interest: Anabaptist history. He traveled to Europe to study some little-known Anabaptist groups as well as the intersection between Mennonites and Jews in some European cities.

When asked if he self-identified as a *nerd*, Ryan’s instant reply was: “Oh yeah.”

He now uses his nerdiness to better the lives of folks in Mountain States Mennonite Conference. For the last two years, Ryan has pastored at Glennon Heights, where his congregation appreciates him so much that they submitted his name to be Conference Moderator, a role which began in 2020.

When asked about his hopes for Mountain States Mennonite Conference in 2021 and beyond, Ryan had this to say: “I think Mountain States is a risk-taking conference that desires to live into a Mennonite identity while exploring new ways and expressions of what it means to be Mennonite today. That’s attracted a lot of younger pastors who are wanting to find new ways of doing community. You also see that in our passion ministries—leaders are displaying Anabaptist/Mennonite values in ways that help the larger culture to be more peaceful and just. I hope we’ll continue to grow into that identity as we explore things like racial justice together.”

And if anyone can lead the way in figuring out how to live into our Mennonite identity, it’s Ryan Koch. And chances are, he’ll do so joyfully.