



# Connections

Mennonite Women Canada encourages women to:

- nurture their life in Christ
- acknowledge and share their gifts
- hear and support each other
- serve and minister across the street and around the world



*As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

1 Peter 4:10

## Greetings from the President

For the past 63 years Mennonite Women Canada (formerly Canadian Women in Mission) has owed its existence to dedicated volunteers who have offered their time and talents to provide leadership and direction for women's ministry across Canada. Working together, under the umbrella of Mennonite Church Canada, they and countless women volunteering in local groups across the provinces have been ministering to others "across the street and around the world".

Today we find ourselves becoming more and more influenced by the events and trends in society and are often overwhelmed by expectations and demands on our time. We hardly have time any more to do "volunteer work"! This is especially true for middle-aged and younger women who have careers.

On March 5-7 our executive met during MC Canada's Spring Leadership Assembly in Winnipeg. Much discussion focused on transitions in women's ministry at the local, provincial and national levels. Many aging women's groups are retiring from active participation and provinces are having difficulty finding volunteers to serve on their executives. At the national level we are currently looking for new reps for BC and MB as well as new women to fill the positions of President and Secretary-Treasurer. Our Nominating Committee is hard at work as I write this.

Please consider whether God is calling YOU to continue the work of the women who have willingly served us in the past.

Many women over the past 40 years have and continue to volunteer at MCC Thrift Shops. This issue of Connections contains a very brief history as well as stories from each province/area about women volunteers who are making a difference! A huge "THANK YOU" to each and every woman who has been involved in this amazing ministry.

Mennonite Women Canada will have a presence at Mennonite World Conference (July 21-26 in Harrisburg, PA) this summer. We will be sharing a display table with Mennonite Women USA. If you are planning to attend please take the time to find us and be part of the "Quilt Project" that is being planned! Hopefully we'll have it done and we will share it in Connections October 2015. If you would like to sign up to spend an hour or two at the display table please contact me at [koopfarms@becon.org](mailto:koopfarms@becon.org).

~ Liz Koop

### 2015-2016 Mennonite Women Canada Executive



Left to right: Elsie Wiebe (MB), Myrna Sawatzky (SK), Liz Koop (President), Lois Mierau (Secretary/Treasurer), Kate Janzen (AB), Phyllis Ramer (ON), Waltrude Gortzen (BC)

# Women at the Heart of Thrift

## *The Thrift Shop Movement in Canada*

From the 1940s through the 1960s, Mennonites in Canada donated used clothing to Mennonite Central Committee for those in need in Europe. By 1968-69 this need had dropped enormously and MCC decided to sharply reduce the amount of used clothing shipped overseas.

What was MCC going to do with such donations?



A group of women from Altona, Manitoba began the first thrift shop in 1972. By the end of 1978 there were 30 shops in Canada and 26 in the U.S.A. These shops were initiated by women. They were small, sometimes cramped and run completely by volunteers, but were very successful in providing funds for MCC. They have continued to be very profitable.

Thrift shops also show concern for creation care by re-using and recycling. They are community-builders as customers, staff and volunteers build relationships.

Patty Ollies is the National Thrift Development Coordinator for MCC Canada.

At the heart of the thrift shop movement are passionate volunteers. Without them the good work of the thrift shops would be very limited.

by Barb Draper  
With information *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada, A History* by Esther Epp-Tiessen, CMU Press, 2013.



Patty Ollies

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## *A Passion for Thrift Shop Treasures: Erika Martens*



Erika Martens, a young mom, started volunteering at the MCC Thrift Shop in Grunthal, MB by clerking with her mother once a month. Now it's every Monday, organizing the shop so that it looks the best it can. She LOVES antique treasure finds! Sharing that passion with customers gives her real pleasure.

It's a joy knowing that she is helping out in her community and in third world countries. It's a joy to see the smiling faces of fellow volunteers on Monday mornings and being a member of the Grunthal MCC family.

Being a Thrift Shop committee member has strengthened her commitment to making the shop a success. "I look at the Thrift Shop from a young perspective and want to keep things fresh and updated so that items will sell," she says. "Christ shining through everything we do!"

by Naomi Unger

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## *Volunteering Means Being Helpful: Geryl Schaaf*

When the Mennonite Community Closet in North Battleford, SK. partitioned a section for used books, Geryl Schaaf volunteered to work in that area. Geryl loves people, she loves books, and she likes to be useful, so now she sorts, prices and shelves books. And she sets aside everything from Archie comics to German Bibles for customers.

Her social work and English tutoring background continue as she chats with people. Relaxed conversations happen in the Book Room. As a volunteer, Geryl has the freedom to spend time chatting with shoppers.

At Hope Mennonite Fellowship, Geryl is a Sunday School teacher, a deacon together with her husband Ken, and pianist. Several Spanish-speaking women from church work at the Closet and frequently ask her for on-the-spot language help. "Our ties at church and the store merge for our mutual benefit."

by Naomi Unger



# Women at the Heart of Thrift

## Receiving More than She Gives: Frieda Dick



Enjoying people, bargain hunting and a commitment to volunteering characterize Frieda Dick. She began volunteering at the Edmonton MCC Thrift Shop in 2003 and works approximately one and a half days a week as the “linen lady.”

Most stained items are recycled, but sometimes she takes crocheted or embroidered items home for laundering. They are precious because they were made by someone’s grandmother.

“There is always a warm welcome when we arrive. Being seniors we may forget that we already gave someone a hug and midway through the morning they get another one!”

Frieda and Henry have visited Cuba, Honduras, Germany and China. She invites IVEPers for supper to make them feel welcome in Canada. “Making connections with these young people happens more easily because we know something about their country.” In volunteering, Frieda feels that she always receives more than she gives.

by Naomi Unger

## For the benefit of MCC: Norma Bergen

In 1994, when her health issues stopped her work as a hairdresser, Norma Bergen chose to follow in her mother’s footsteps and became a volunteer in the Abbotsford Thrift Shop. Her mother sorted jewelry; Norma sorted books.

Norma remembers when a manager picked up a New Testament that was in a give-away basket at the till. Inside was her brother’s name. She hadn’t seen her brother for many years, but his signature showed her that he had known about God and had cared enough to write his name in the Testament.

When red boots were donated, Norma just had to try them on. They became a prop for her presentation to the Business Women of Abbotsford. She wore them while encouraging volunteers from her church and again at the Shop’s Christmas Banquet. Norma says, “I will gladly make a fool of myself for the benefit of MCC.”

by Waltrude Gortzen



## Serving is at the Core

The volunteers at the St. Catharines, ON Thrift Shop serve over 200 customers daily. They want to be a beacon of hope locally while supporting the broader work of MCC. Many of the 180 volunteers received help from MCC to emigrate to Canada and are now happily giving back. Giving to God, honouring one’s parents, gratitude for blessings, recycling, MCC’s vision for peace, and helping those who can’t afford “new” are also motivating factors.



Comments from volunteers include:

- \*\*\*I can’t think of a better way to spend some of my retirement hours than helping to keep useless items out of the landfill while helping the poor.
- \*\*\*I loved volunteering from the start.
- \*\*\*I’ve made wonderful friends.
- \*\*\*I enjoy the camaraderie. It’s like a family bonding together to serve a greater good.
- \*\*\*We’ll be here until we can’t and we are not ready to quit yet!

This past year the Christian Benefit Thrift Shop published a book of stories, photos and recipes to celebrate forty years of God’s blessings upon the shop and its volunteers.

by the Friday volunteers

# Opportunities for Giving

- **Spiritual Growth Assistance Fund (SGAF)**
- **Pennies and Prayer Legacy Fund (PPLF)**
- **International Ministries**
- **Short Term Ministries**
- **Publication and Communication**

For more information please visit our website at:  
<http://women.mennonitechurch.ca/>

## OUR PPLF RECIPIENTS



**Darnell & Christina  
Barkman (Philippines)**

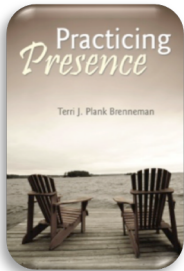


**Nathan & Taryn Dirks  
(Botswana)**

*Thank you for recent donations to PPLF!*

- ~ **Saskatchewan Women in Mission**
- ~ **Alberta Women in Mission**
- ~ **Women of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada**
- ~ **MCBC Women's Ministry**

## Annual Bible Study Guide



2014 ~ *Practicing Presence*  
by Terri Plank Brenneman

2015 ~ *Spark,  
Igniting your  
God-given  
Creativity*  
by April Yamasaki



Mennonite Women Canada sends out a complementary copy to each church. Please contact us if you would like to be on our mailing list! To order additional copies contact Craig Anderson at 1-800-631-6535 or [craiga@mennomedia.org](mailto:craiga@mennomedia.org). Online at [www.mennomedia.org](http://www.mennomedia.org) or [www.commonword.ca](http://www.commonword.ca)

See full length interviews on our website at  
<http://women.mennonitechurch.ca/>

## OUR 2014 SGAF RECIPIENTS



**Jessica Reesor Rempel** (left) from Kitchener, ON is studying at Emmanuel College/Toronto School of Theology. **Kirsten Schroeder** (right) from Winnipeg, MB is taking courses at Providence Theological Seminary, Otterbourne, MB.

## Area Events

- April 18 ~ WMCEC Spring Enrichment Day** at Listowel Mennonite Church, Listowel, ON. Theme: Helping Vulnerable Women
- April 25 ~ Saskatchewan WM Enrichment Day** at Zoar Mennonite Church, Waldheim, SK. Theme: Voices of Change
- May 2 ~ BC Women's Ministry Inspirational Day** at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, BC
- May 22-24 ~ Alberta WM Spring Retreat** at Sunnyside Christian Retreat Centre, Sylvan Lake, AB. Theme: We were made to thrive
- July 21-26 ~ Mennonite World Conference** in Harrisburg, PA
- Spring 2016 ~ Sister Care Seminar** in Manitoba

\*\*\*Posters/links for these events can be found on our website and blog and write-ups will be posted on our blog.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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