



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

Over the years women's groups have enthusiastically supported the various projects of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Our April *Connections* contained a brief history with stories of women involved in MCC Thrift Shops across the provinces; this issue focuses on women who sew and knot comforters for MCC relief work as well as those who piece and stitch quilts by hand for auction at MCC Relief Sales/Festivals.

With the current overwhelming plight of thousands upon thousands of refugees fleeing from the Middle East to Europe, let us all do what we can to help. Let's continue to support MCC's relief efforts by knotting comforters, sewing and filling school and hygiene kits, sponsoring refugees and donating to the Syria/Iraq Relief Fund. More information is available at <http://mcccanada.ca/learn/what/relief/syria>

This spring my husband and I traveled to the Middle East with a tour group led by professors from Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB. With MCC Country Reps, Gordon and Carolyn Epp-Fransen, our group delivered comforters and school and health kits to a Syrian refugee family living in Amman, Jordan. I can't forget the smiles on the faces of the mother and her five children, especially the young girl as she wrapped herself in one of the comforters.



Another highlight for me was representing MW Canada at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Harrisburg, PA. Held every 6 years it brings together Anabaptist Mennonites from around the world. I designed a quilt/banner and women added 160 footprints to it representing the theme **"Walking with God"**. It was wonderful to meet so many women from all parts of the world. The banner is not completed yet but it is a 'work in progress' (see photo above). I'm hoping it will be in the **"Parade of Banners"** at the next Mennonite World Conference 2021 in Indonesia. For more details about MWC see our blog posts from July. <http://mennowomencanada.blogspot.ca/>



Executive Update:

We are again appealing to women who have a heart for women's ministry to consider volunteering for the position of President or Secretary-Treasurer beginning July 2016. More information is posted on the Mennonite Church Canada website. <http://women.mennonitechurch.ca/leadership>



This past spring the Saskatchewan Women in Mission organization disbanded. A reflection written by Lois Siemens appeared in the June 8, 2015 Canadian Mennonite. They are in the process of visioning what women's ministry in SK will look like. Let's keep them in our prayers as they meet at their Women's Retreat on October 16 and 17.

~ Liz Koop

Comforting Others Around the World

Mennonite women making blankets

In the past, sewing for charity was one reason Mennonite women formed organized groups. During WW II women's groups sent material aid, including blankets, to England and Europe through the Red Cross and Mennonite Central Committee.

To raise money for missionaries and mission projects, women made quilts for auctions or raffles. In 1959 Ruth and Rhoda Ressler, sisters on furlough from Japan, were guest speakers at the annual meeting of the Ontario Women's Missionary and Service Auxiliary. Between sessions, women knotted two comforters for the Ressler's to take back with them. (1a)

In 1964, Canadian Women in Mission reported that 210 groups had sewn 3,325 blankets. (1b) In the early 1970's, MCC Canada stopped shipping clothing overseas, but still encouraged the sewing of comforters. This stirred people's hands and hearts in ways that writing cheques did not. By the 2000's, blankets were symbols of healing, friendship, and peace, not just material help. However, blankets don't resolve long-term or chronic needs and can symbolize a world fraught with inequality. (2)

MCC shipped over 45,000 blankets this past year, mainly to Jordan, Syria, Bosnia and Lebanon. (from the MCC website)

(1a, 1b) Canadian Women in Mission, 1895-1952-2002 by Esther Patkau
(2) Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History by Esther Epp-Tiessen

by Naomi Unger



Dora Wiebe: Blankets are her Passion

Women in the Glenbush Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church (SK) have sewn blankets for the Mennonite Community Closet, North Battleford, for many years. Dora Wiebe is their primary seamstress.

She sews winter and summer, whether her grandchildren are present or not. She delights in both the process and the end result. She enjoys browsing through quilt books and trying new patterns.

Dora recognizes that her talent is God's gift, so she wants to use that gift to bless others with warm, attractive, economical blankets for the thrift store to sell.

"God is a quilter who guides me," says Dora. "For example, I had laid out a top, and as I sewed it, I realized that I wasn't sewing it as I'd planned. When it was done, the finished blanket was much better than my original. I realized then that the quilting was God's doing, not mine."

"Another time, I started a top but thought there wasn't enough fabric to finish it. I sensed God telling me to use that fabric anyway. So I did, and there was just the right amount."

The Glenbush quilters complete Dora's blankets in the winter. Dora takes a photograph of each finished blanket as a keepsake of her passion.

by Naomi Unger

Blankets for Jesus - A Morden Ministry

Every Monday from approximately the end of October until the end of April, the gym in the Morden Mennonite Church (MB) becomes a blanket-making centre. Eight to ten women come to sew and pin and tie knots as part of a group of 12-14 volunteers called Blankets for Jesus. They come to have fellowship while putting their faith into action. Although fewer women participate than in the past, they still make about 200 blankets annually.

Tina Hildebrand and Elma Sawatzky oversee the work and do all the purchasing. Tina has always enjoyed sewing and so she quilts at the MCC depot in

Plum Coulee as well. Mary Dyck, in her late 90s, comes faithfully to pin the blankets - standing all day to do so! Viola Goertzen gets bedskirts from the Community Thrift Store where she works and sews those into tops, up to sixty annually.

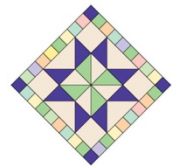
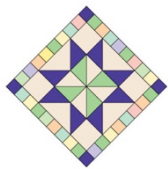
The Homemakers Group of the church gives a portion of their fundraising proceeds to Blankets for Jesus every second year. From time to time the Missions Committee and individuals give money to the quilting group. The family of a deceased quilter recently designated memorial donations to Blankets for Jesus as well. This generosity is much appreciated.

by Naomi Unger from an interview with Tina Hildebrand

Blankets for MCC ~ Didsbury, AB

Every year during the month of March, Bergthal Church in Didsbury, AB becomes a hive of blanket-making activity as the women have their annual tying blitz. Blanket tops pieced at home are brought to the church where they're put together with the backing and filler then placed on frames and knotted. Some other families make their blankets at home. By the time all is said and done, 80-100 blankets are completed and then donated to MCC's Material Resources program.

by Linda Dickinson



Comforting Others Around the World

Hawkesville dares to piece quilts collaboratively

For the past 15 years, the women of Hawkesville (ON) Mennonite Church have worked together to piece their annual quilt to be sold at the New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale. In the fall, interested women gather to piece a quilt top, either on a Saturday, or as an activity at their women's retreat. Julene Fast organizes the project, choosing a pattern that she tries out ahead of time. She has all the steps written down so that many people of all ages can get involved. Some choose fabrics, other cut, sew or do the pressing.

"Last year she didn't show us the pattern or her quilt ahead of time, so it was a bit of mystery and an exercise in trust," said Arlene Martin. She also commented that the biggest challenge is to get a consistent ¼-inch seam so that the blocks fit together accurately. The quilting is done in January and it usually takes them about a week to quilt it by hand with tiny stitches.

"It's a huge joy to lead this group of women who so faithfully and energetically pieced about 15 quilts like this," says Julene. "It's fun to see women enjoy what they are doing and to see some try things they have not tried before."



by Barb Draper

The Quilting Plus Group

The Quilting Plus Group at First Mennonite Edmonton (AB) met for the first time on August 3, 2004. A number of women had expressed interest in setting aside a time on a weekly basis to do projects for MCC, thinking particularly of making blankets. We were gifted a number of bags of fabric and quilt blocks which needed to be put together and that gave us a project to start with. At the same time there was also interest in learning some basic quilting skills – which Lola Neufeldt agreed to provide.

We have made several hundred blankets for MCC, sewn hundreds of School Kit Bags, made cot sheets for our daycare, made aprons for the MCC Sale breakfasts, and have made Quilts for the MCC Sale each year. On alternate weeks some of us bring projects that we are working on at home. We have been taught many different skills – paper piercing, stack and whack, table runners, place mats, and jackets made out of sweat shirts, to name a few.

Tuesday mornings have become a highlight for us, a time to be with friends and work on worthwhile projects. Of course we are always ready for coffee break, when there is always an inspiring reading and prayer. Over the years we have had a total of 30 different women attend, many of whom have no sewing experience; if you can tie a knot you are welcome!

(excerpted from an article by Irene Baergen)



Providing Comfort with Love



Within MCBC's 31 congregations you will still find a few women's groups that gather regularly to sew blankets for MCC. They are mostly seniors that carry the love for MCC in their hearts because they know that if it were not for MCC they and their families would not be here enjoying the freedom to meet and sew blankets.

One such group meets at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, BC every second Tuesday morning from September to May. Feeling the call to pay back and bless others with blankets, 10 women began the group in February 2000. Today the group has about 23 members and they are still going strong.

They include a coffee break with a short devotional during their time together as well as an offering to cover some of their sewing expenses. To date, under the leadership of Tina Harder, they have made and delivered about 2500 blankets to MCC. May God continue to bless their work!

By Waltrude Gortzen

Note: For full length articles more and colour photos with captions please see our 'Stories' section on our website at <http://women.mennonitechurch.ca/stories>

Opportunities for Giving

- **Spiritual Growth Assistance Fund (SGAF)**
- **Pennies and Prayer Legacy Fund (PPLF)**
- **International Ministries** (Thailand)
- **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!

~ Kara Ledohowski
~ Norma Koop in memory of Judith Dyck
~ Saskatchewan Women in Mission
~ Alberta Women in Mission

2015 Annual Bible Study Guide

Spark, Igniting your God-given Creativity
by April Yamasaki

Mennonite Women Canada sends a complementary copy to each church every year. Please contact MW Canada if you would like to be on our mailing list! To order additional copies please contact Craig Anderson at 1-800-631-6535 or 1-519-747-5722 or

craig@mennomedia.org.

Online orders at www.mennomedia.org or www.commonword.ca

Additional information available on our blog at



Also available *“Spark Retreat Kit”* with Bible studies, creative guide, participant guide and director's guide. Intended to be comprehensive with easy-to-follow directions, equipping women to lead the retreat themselves and helpful for team building for women's groups of all sizes and ages.

2015 SGAF Recipients

Shari Nash from London ON, studying at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, ON
Danielle Fillion Rimbault from Kitchener, ON is also studying at Conrad Grebel University College.

Laura Funk from Winnipeg, MB will be studying at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, IN in January 2016.

Area Events

Oct 16 & 17 ~ Saskatchewan WM Retreat
at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, SK. Theme: Igniting our Creativity ~ Looking back / Moving forward.

Oct 16-18 ~ BC Women's Ministry Retreat
at Camp Squeah, Hope, BC

Oct 31 - Nov 1 ~ WMCEC Sister Care Retreat
at Hidden Acres Camp, New Hamburg, ON

April 23, 2016 ~ WMCEC Spring Enrichment Day at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, ON

May 13 & 14, 2016 ~ Sister Care Seminar with Carolyn Holderread Heggen and Rhoda Keener at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, MB

May 20-22 ~ Alberta WM Spring Retreat

June 3-5 ~ WMCEC Sister Care Retreat
in Wainfleet, ON

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

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