



"SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD:"

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SERVICES IN
THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES

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North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century (1940-1960)

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by

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For the booklet commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Shafter Mennonite Brethren Church (Shafter, California), Mrs. Jim Klassen submitted the following historical account on behalf of the Ladies Sewing Circle:

During the early years of the Shafter Mennonite Brethren Church, there was one of our devoted mothers who saw a need for the young women and girls to become involved in the work of the local church. Her desire to serve the Lord and help these young people led her into forming a sewing group which met in the homes. They embroidered many beautiful articles, made quilts, and at the end of each year, together with home baked products and candy, they held an auction sale. This mother was Mrs. Helena Petker, and her vision and foresight took hold and this became an active organization in the local church. These sales provided a means of financing both home and foreign mission work. It also gave the young ladies an insight into the needs of the mission fields and the local church. Out of this early group came four missionaries, Rubena Schultz Pietsch, Helen Koehn Neufeld, Elizabeth Wall Dick, and Sarah Balzer Field."

In one succinct paragraph, Klassen has given us one of the significant linkages among Mennonite Brethren, that of women to the cause of missions.

Mention of women's organized mission activity dates back to some of the earliest North American Mennonite Brethren records. Conference minutes note donations from women's missionary societies as early as 1881--four years after the first unofficial conference meeting of North American Mennonite Brethren.² Women, both married and single, were also a significant missionary force in the developing mission fields funded by North American Mennonite Brethren.³

Though women are no longer instructed to keep silent during conference deliberations, their work has received little attention. The statistical reports presented at the Mennonite Brethren district conferences (United States) do not include data about women's organizations until 1949 in the Pacific District (discontinued 1957 - 1963), 1956 in the Central District, and 1966 in the Southern District--although nearly every congregation, including home mission churches, had at least one mission or sewing circle. By contrast, the statistical reports regularly included information on the number and membership of musical groups, youth organizations, Sunday School classes,

Daily Vacation Bible Schools, and extension programs.

The purpose of this paper, and the research project it is derived from, has been to gather information and begin to tell the story of the women's missionary societies among Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States. I have attempted to establish the significance of the missionary societies and the Women's Missionary Services for the cause of missions, the larger Conference, and for the women themselves. For the purposes of this symposium, I have focused on the formal organization of the Women's Missionary Societies which took place at mid-century.

A Survey of Early Mennonite Brethren Mission Societies and Sewing Circles
1860 - 1950

By the turn of the century, many of the earliest North American congregations were well-established and regularly contributing to mission causes. Early mission societies often included participation by both men and women in the activities of the day; women sewed while men met for Bible study and prayer.⁴ Eventually, the societies became exclusively female.

These early circles afforded an opportunity for fellowship and for inspiration. They also provided a way to actively support local and overseas mission efforts in spite of limited finances. Together with the mission sales, these early groups provided support of both cash and goods to the fledgling mission projects of Mennonite Brethren.

As Mennonite Brethren spread across the prairies and to the west, new congregations organized and settled into church life. A survey of congregational histories written for various anniversary celebrations reveals that mission societies or sewing circles were often among the early organizations of the local church, and grew out of the members' commitment to mission.⁵

As members and groups grew older, many congregations began new, or

"junior" sewing circles. Many of these groups attempted to meet the changing schedules and interests of younger women. In Buhler, Kansas, ten women organized the Herwana Chapter, March 3, 1937, and asked missionary on furlough, Mrs. John H. [Maria] Pankratz, to serve as a sponsor.⁶ Among their projects was the support of an indigenous preacher and several orphans in India.⁷ In Shafter, California, the Naehverein had disbanded in 1934, but in 1939 a "Bible Class and Sewing Hour" grew out of a Sunday School class taught by Mrs. P.P. Rempel. As well as relief sewing, the group canned fruit for the Civilian Public Service camps, and gave aid to people with various needs.⁸ In Corn, Oklahoma, the junior sisters organized in 1945. This group chose to focus primarily on local mission projects, leaving the older group to continue serving foreign missions.⁹ Among their ministries was a children's hour conducted prior to the message on the first, third and fifth Sundays.¹⁰ In Reedley, California, the Christian Charity Workers organized with nineteen members on January 21, 1937 as a "junior sewing circle especially for working girls and young mothers who were unable to attend day meetings."¹¹

Many circles began sewing for relief in addition to their foreign and home mission projects. The devastation of World War II and the work of the General Welfare and Public Relations Board (Mennonite Brethren) together with Mennonite Central Committee presented both a need and ways to meet that need. Tina Dahl, who assisted in the administrative work, reported to the 42nd General Conference in 1943 that twenty-nine churches had "organized relief circles which sew garments for sale or for direct donations for Home Mission stations, for Red Cross or clothing sent abroad."¹²

The financial needs of home mission and other projects continued to receive support from various circles and mission societies. For example, the Home for the Aged in Reedley received donations from missionary societies for

the furnishing of additional resident rooms.¹³ The minutes of the Southern District Conference also record cash donations from individual circles for a variety of home missions projects throughout the 1940's. At least one circle, the Hillsboro Sewing Circle, contributed toward the colonization and rehabilitation program for men who had served in the Civilian Public Service (C.P.S.) program during World War II.¹⁴

Sewing circles also provided funding for local church needs. In 1948, the editors of the fiftieth anniversary booklet prepared for the Harvey, North Dakota, congregation, noted that "when other departments of the church are in need of finances it calls on this society."¹⁵ With good reason--between 1945 and 1948 the group contributed \$1,076.88 to the church's general fund, \$1,000 for a new parsonage, and \$627.13 for "flowers, sick and funerals, cards postage and merchandise."¹⁶ In 1940 the women's groups at the Bethel Mennonite Brethren Church in Yale, South Dakota, offered to give up to \$500 to improve acoustics in the church sanctuary, and in 1941 promised \$250 for other church improvements. Local church historian Joseph A. Kleinsasser noted that in 1944, "the matter of giving some support to the boys in the Service was a concern of the men at the business meeting. They settled it by giving the Ladies Aid the responsibility."¹⁷ In 1949, the Yale women contributed half the purchase price of the parsonage--\$250.00.¹⁸ Likewise, the Corn women were involved in the building and furnishing of the Corn church building after it was destroyed by fire in early 1949.¹⁹ During the 1940's the "Willing Workers of God" in Dinuba, California, helped furnish the Zion Mennonite Brethren church nursery and kitchen, and bought shrubbery for the church landscaping.²⁰

Until 1948, no formal organization of the various women's groups existed on a district level. Each circle functioned independently. Most elected officers and kept records. Projects were chosen by the individual groups.

Funds were raised in a variety of ways; circles catered meals, sold food at public auctions, held mission sales of goods such as handmade quilts and other items, collected offerings, etc. Women were significantly involved in relief efforts, and served as an additional funding source for special church projects. Although recognized as existing, sewing circles were not included in the various statistical reports of the district conferences which recorded the activities and organizations of the local churches.

United Efforts: Formal Organization of the Women's Missionary Services

Pacific District

In 1948, Lydia Martens, a member of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren church, was asked by the Program Committee planning the 39th Pacific District Conference to survey the work of the various missionary societies and report to the Conference.²¹ Toward the end of the convention held that fall in Bakersfield, California, Martens reported that each church in the Pacific District had at least one missionary society organized--a total of 18 groups--with approximately 380 members.²² She added that a recommendation to organize had come from several groups and closed with the following words,

We know there is much to be done, and as Jesus' body would have missed its anointing but for Mary, so many things that are dear to the heart of our Lord will be left undone unless we women do it. Let us have "faith that worketh by love," that we may hear the Lord's words, "She hath done what she could."²³

In response, conference moderator G. H. Jantzen "encouraged the Missionary Society and asked them to go ahead and report next year at the District Conference."²⁴ Before the conference ended, and at the urging of women attending, Martens agreed to call an organizational meeting which then took place later that fall.²⁵

There was some opposition to the meeting. Nevertheless, with the Conference's backing, Martens, and those planning the meeting, continued their

efforts. They were unprepared for a letter which informed them that several groups would not be participating in the meeting. Lydia Martens recalled the issue as follows:

It seemed that some were fearful that the women wanted to be on the Conference Program and gradually would take over. We made several long distance telephone calls trying to explain that this was not the case; we simply wanted to work together in a more effective way and encourage one another. We were informed that a letter had been written to our Pastor, Bro. J.B. Toews, that he would explain to us.²⁶

A letter had been sent to Toews reporting the resolution of the Shafter Church Council and asking that it be presented "to the sisters who are in charge of calling this meeting." The resolution read as follows:

We the Church Council of the Shafter Mennonite Brethren church, encourage our sisters to continue with the work but we do not wish them to organize with the intention to report to the Pacific District Conference.²⁷

The letter continued:

We have also talked to our Sewing Circle. We have as a church no objection in their planning together and counselling together of how to carry on their work, but our Sewing Circle officers do not wish to be presented at the Conference in a report that is given by their organization as an official conference organization. They rather choose to work quietly under the direction of our local relief committee and Church Council who shall make it a point to report and carefully pray and support the worthy efforts of our Sewing Circle.²⁸

Interestingly, the Shafter women had originally planned to attend the organizational meeting. The minutes of the Shafter Relief Workers indicate that their regularly scheduled Thursday meeting was moved forward to Wednesday because of their plans to attend the November 4 meeting.²⁹

Despite this incident, plans proceeded, aided by the encouragement of Marten's pastor, J. B. Toews.³⁰ Toews spoke not only as pastor but with the support of several other conference leaders. In consultation with B. J. Braun (then a member of the Board of Reference and Counsel, and past Assistant Moderator for the Conference) and H. R. Wiens (newly elected to the Home Missions Department), the letter was held back. Toews subsequently wrote to

Waldo Wiebe, pastor at Shafter, informing him that they had not felt it appropriate to read the letter at the meeting "for as much as the Conference had passed a resolution recommending that this organization be effected."³¹ Thus, with conference approval and pastoral encouragement, formal organization took place on November 14, 1948.³²

The meeting was held at the Reedley Mennonite Brethren church with Lydia Martens presiding and J. B. Toews providing a devotional message.

Representatives from various women's groups, plus a representative for the Mennonite Central Committee work presented reports, and the group elected officers.³³ An attachment to the minutes notes that "it was very encouraging to hear the reports of how many of [our] local Pastors are working with and encouraging the women to do all they can for the Missionary needs," and expressed thanks for "the encouragement and support giben [sic] to this committee by many of our Pastors."³⁴

The new organization met annually in conjunction with the District Conference, meetings which were primarily inspirational. Aside from a "Gift Day" for the Home for the Aged in Reedley, there is little evidence of special project approval. The general budget remained small and dependent primarily on the offerings lifted at the annual business meetings.³⁵

At the 1950 annual meeting a name was chosen--"M.B. Missionary Service."³⁶ By then, twenty-one circles had joined the Missionary Service. The statistical report submitted that year to the District Conference indicates a total membership of 366. A cash income of \$14,995.97 was reported, with an additional \$11,906.49 valuation of goods in kind.³⁷ This represented a membership average of \$73.50 per member. In comparison, the total receipts for the District Conference averaged \$93.85 per member.³⁸

During the mid-fifties the WMS made a number of significant decisions

which shaped the Service for the future. On November 13, 1954, the Executive Board agreed to recommend the trial approval of a constitution.³⁹ The constitution stated that the purpose of the WMS was "to promote spiritual growth" and "to help the various needs of our church, District Conference and General Conference with our prayers, sewing, donations in kind and cash." Operating expenses were to be met by individual and group contributions, and offerings taken at the WMS meetings.⁴⁰ The constitution called for an Executive Committee of eight and listed its voting body as "the chairman of each sewing circle, the pastor's wife from each church, and one delegate for each ten members of the individual church sewing circles."⁴¹ The chair of each circle and the pastor's wife from each church also served on the Executive Board.⁴² The delegates accepted the executive committee's recommendation, approving the constitution on a trial basis.

The minutes of the November 15, 1954 annual meeting reflect two other significant occurrences. The first was the approval of a motion to adopt a unified study plan in the circles. The second was approval of a request made by Mrs. Henry Kliever, dietician at Pacific Bible Institute in Fresno, to fund the purchase of drapes for the dining hall.⁴³ The first is indicative of a move towards a more unified program among the circles; the second represents the first formal request recorded for special project funding from the WMS, requests which were to become frequent.

The first missionary rally sponsored by the WMS was held in Shafter on the morning and afternoon of March 17, 1955, and conducted on much the same lines as the annual meeting. Some brief business was conducted and a program of inspirational music and missionary testimonies was given. Of particular importance, however, was the presentation and acceptance of a foreign mission project to build and maintain a maternity hospital on the mission field--

"provided the churches are in favor." Each circle was instructed to "present the project to their local pastors and inform the Conference Chairman of their decision."⁴⁴

When the Executive Committee met in April of that year, they were apparently confident that the project would meet with the various pastors' approval. It was agreed "that when the Maternity Hospital project is accepted the money will be collected according to membership, \$3.00 per member plus Hospital Supplies."⁴⁵ The Committee's faith was justified. At the annual meeting in 1955, Secretary-Treasurer Sophie Enns was able to report that over \$2,000 had been received for the maternity hospital--a figure that exceeded their goal.⁴⁶

These decisions point to a growing sense of awareness among the WMS leadership about the strength of unified operation. Opposition to the Service had died and membership grown, although caution was still clearly exercised in decision-making as indicated by the handling of the maternity hospital project. The Executive Committee had already developed some stability by staggering the terms of office.⁴⁷ A regular program of missionary support through prayer and gifts had been developed. Circles were encouraged to be in contact with their assigned missionaries, and special missionary needs were regularly made known to the circles.⁴⁸ They were also encouraged to exchange yearbooks and to model them on the conference yearbook.⁴⁹

At least one other significant decision was made during 1955. At the December 8 Executive Committee meeting, a motion was made and carried to appoint Mrs. Abe [Marie] Leppke and Mrs. Mary Letkeman to a two-year term as WMS historians, a decision which points to growing self-awareness of the significance of the WMS for women in the Pacific District Conference. By the end of the year the Service was ready to take on additional projects. At the

annual meeting in Dallas, Oregon, on November 10, the Service accepted a recommendation by the Executive Board to fund a maternity hospital in Africa (\$1,000 per year) and to accept "an educational project pertaining to groceries, clothing and baby furniture, at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary."⁵⁰

By the end of the decade, the WMS in the Pacific District had matured into a well-organized society, with a clear sense of direction and healthy finances. Foreign missions remained at the heart of the Service, although local projects were also given attention. A diminished need for sewing had been noted, and in its place, the Executive Board encouraged the circles to focus on prayer and Bible study.⁵¹ The WMS increasingly funded a variety of missionary and special projects that required more in the way of finances than actual sewing. In 1959, over \$7,000 of the \$9,321.07 disbursed went to foreign projects and to missionaries. Relief work (sewing and the gathering of used clothing) continued to be channeled through Mennonite Central Committee.

Southern District

In contrast to the Pacific District, the Southern District's organization was self-initiated and does not appear to have met with the resistance the Pacific District women experienced. Waldo Hiebert, in a paper written July, 1956, attributed the desire to organize, in part, to a desire for better control of Mennonite Brethren dollars.⁵² Certainly the organization of the Pacific District women also contributed.

At the Southern District Conference held October 25-29, 1952 in Hillsboro, Kansas, women from the local congregation hosted a meeting where they exchanged information about their local circles, and listened to reports from visiting missionaries about their field work. It was suggested that they

meet again at the next conference, however, this meeting failed to take place.⁵³

During the fall of 1954 the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches met in Hillsboro, providing the Hillsboro women another opportunity to encourage unification. They again hosted a meeting for women, but this time took even greater initiative, calling together several meetings for pastor's wives and officers of local circles.⁵⁴ Problems were discussed as well as the possibility of a unified organization. Women visiting from the Pacific District shared the advantages of their own organization, and a decision was made to call for a business meeting at the District convention which was scheduled for Fairview, Oklahoma, later that fall.⁵⁵

At the Fairview meeting Mrs. J. J. [Marie] Gerbrandt, chair of the Senior Circle at Hillsboro, spoke about the Pacific District's WMS and then "asked the ladies if they would like to organize in a similar manner."⁵⁶ They responded positively and elected her Chairman.⁵⁷ Twenty-nine circles are listed on the initial roster for 1954-1955.⁵⁸ Waldo Hiebert credits Gerbrandt for careful navigation through the political waters of the conference. He wrote,

Mrs. J. J. Gerbrandt, a born leader and an able women's worker with vision and insight, set about immediately to avoid, if possible, some of the rough spots the Pacific District women had encountered. One of their major struggles was to receive recognition and encouragement from the pastors of some of the churches. Mrs. Gerbrandt immediately called a meeting of the newly elected officers to compile a document for presentation on the floor of the district conference.⁵⁹

The Committee reported to the delegates that there had been a "growing desire" to organize, that their purpose was "to promote a more uniform missionary program in our churches," that the organization would "serve as the channel through which the mission boards will be able to make their needs know to the individual circles," and assured the delegates that they would "not interfere

in any way with the work of the local organizations."⁶⁰ They recommended the acceptance of the organization as an official conference organization, and also recommended that the WMS conduct its meetings during the annual district conventions. The delegates responded by referring the request for recognition to the Constitution Committee because of implications for the District constitution.⁶¹

In contrast to the Pacific District, the Southern District immediately sought projects for the newly formed organization. In January of 1955, the Executive Committee met with J. B. Toews and A. E. Janzen from the Board of Foreign Missions, and with members of the Evangelism Committee of the Southern District. They chose two projects which they presented by letter to members of the WMS.⁶² The maternity hospital in Africa was presented as a foreign mission project and involved both cash donations and sewing. A cash contribution of \$5.00 per month, per circle was requested, and patterns promised for hospital gowns and baby shirts.⁶³ A home missions project consisting of aid to establish a new congregation in Denver, Colorado, was also presented. The Committee proposed that the circles agree to pay the rent for meeting space for one year--again at a cost of \$5.00 per circle, per month.⁶⁴

As had the Executive Committee in the Pacific District, the Southern District leaders immediately assigned missionaries to the various circles for their prayer support. They also continued to work at the details of organization, choosing a name, the Women's Missionary Service (WMS) of the Southern District Conference, and preparing a list of recommendations for the next business session.⁶⁵ At the annual meeting held October 24, 1955, the membership established the delegation for business decisions as each circle chair, the pastors' wives and one delegate for each ten members of the various

circles.⁶⁶ The members also accepted a recommendation to add a third field of service to their existing foreign and home missions projects. The Executive Committee recommended a budget of \$3,000 to be divided equally between foreign missions, home missions, and Tabor College.⁶⁷ This represented a significant budget jump (the budget goal for the previous year was \$2,000, a sum which was not quite met), and a commitment to education on par with foreign and home missions. The actual projects chosen ranged from hospital beds (foreign missions), furnishings for the Home Economics room at the El Faro, Texas, mission (home missions), to furnishings for the Mennonite Brethren archives in the new Tabor College library.⁶⁸ It was agreed that giving was to be based on membership, with smaller circles (less than 20 members) asked to contribute \$100 and larger circles (more than 20 members) asked to donate \$200.⁶⁹

Although clearly a primary concern, the Executive Committee's vision was not limited to the funding of mission projects. Prayer chairperson Zola Janzen noted that during the 1955-1956 year, she wrote "forty-five letters to different circle chairmen and prayer chairmen concerning missionaries on their lists who might be in special need of prayer or other attention."⁷⁰ That same year the Committee raised the idea of a special page in the Christian Leader, and began to explore the possibility of a women's meeting to be held at the triennial General Conference. The possibility of a regional missionary rally was also raised. A brief article in The Christian Leader notes that three rallies were then planned for Balko, Oklahoma (April 23); Fairview, Oklahoma (April 24); and Buhler, Kansas (April 25).⁷¹ Their success encouraged the membership to pass a motion in favor of continuing area rallies.

Although their budget was not large, in many ways the Southern District WMS initially defined its organization as a support service and particularly a funding source for Mennonite Brethren missions. In a report submitted to the

Southern District Conference meeting in Corn, Oklahoma, in 1956, Marie

Gerbrandt stated that

The purpose of this organization is to promote a more uniform missionary program in our churches. It serves as a channel through which the mission boards, and missionaries, can make their needs know. It is hoped that it shall also serve to harness some of the money that would otherwise flow into projects outside of our conference.⁷²

They struggled with requests for financial aid which came from "the sidelines" and agreed that because their funds were budgeted, they could not take on additional projects.⁷³ They also reiterated their commitment to working through the conference mission agencies. "If projects are important enough," they decided, "they must be cleared through the mission boards and then be suggested to us as possible projects for next year."⁷⁴ They also maintained a clear division between work done for Mennonite Brethren missions and that done for relief. In a letter to secretary-treasurer Ferne Hiebert, dated January, 1958, Helen Franz, chairperson of the WMS, noted that:

In previous years the Relief and M.C.C. question has come up and Mrs. J. J. Gerbrandt's committee gave this serious consideration. We came to the conclusion not to reach out into another area but stay within the Mennonite Brethren conference, since we are all conference women.⁷⁵

This is in considerable contrast to the Pacific District WMS, which from the beginning incorporated M.C.C. relief work into their district organization.⁷⁶

The focus on project funding, however, meant that circles had to have some sort of cash flow. Clothes sales, custom quilting, banquets and fellowship suppers, food service at auctions, monthly dues, mission sales, offerings, and wedding and banquet catering were fund-raising methods used by various circles.⁷⁷

Throughout the 1950's, the Women's Missionary Service continued to divide their budget of \$3,000, three ways, including any funds raised above budget. The projects accepted by the membership tended to be practical, and given a choice, they tended to opt for projects which benefited women. For example,

when presented with a choice of small projects to be funded from the excess funds gathered in 1958, the members chose the purchase of a delivery table (maternity) for a hospital in Mexico over the funding of Bible School students or other hospital supplies for the foreign mission portion of the excess. They divided the home mission portion among fourteen "lady workers" in South Texas, and contributed to the purchase of a tile block floor for the Tabor College cafeteria.⁷⁸ In 1959 they donated \$1,000 to the College for the equipping of the home economics department, and purchased folding chairs for the Newton (Kans.), and Topeka (Kans.) Sunday School programs.⁷⁹ Among the choices on the 1959-1960 project ballot was a choice between renovations and chairs for the science lecture room at Tabor College, and lounge-room furniture for the girls' dormitory. Lounge-room furniture was chosen.⁸⁰

The Committee followed the progress of the projects. A. E. Janzen, in a letter addressed to Elfreda Fast, wrote:

In compliance with your request we are glad to send you a statement about the project of the Hospital at Nuevo Ideal, Mexico towards which the W.M.S. of the Southern District has kindly contributed the much appreciated \$.⁸¹

His two-page letter proceeded to outline the work accomplished and provided a financial report of the \$1,166.66 received from the WMS for the hospital project.⁸²

The circles also continued to do handwork. In the fall of 1959, Work Chairperson Mrs. J.D. Ens, reported that 28 circles provided approximately 818 lbs. of material for foreign missions, 4,609 lbs. for home missions, and 762 lbs. for relief.⁸³

The organization also extended a welcome to the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) women living in the Southern District. Plans for merger between the Mennonite Brethren and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren had been approved in 1958 and 1959, with formal merger taking place in November, 1960.⁸⁴

Letters of invitation were sent to KMB churches as early as 1958, inviting participation in the area mission rallies. In February of 1959, Elfreda Fast noted:

I believe that the Springfield and Zoar [KMB] churches were invited last year. However, the invitation went to the pastor, I believe, and for some reason was not passed on to the women. I don't know the details, but would suggest that we find out who the leading women are in these two churches and then extend the invitation to them.⁸⁵

Names of leading women were apparently found for letters went out to Mrs. Peter E. Heinrichs of the Springfield KMB church in Canton, Kansas, and Mrs. Menno Prieb of the Zoar KMB church in Inman, Kansas. This time the pastors were sent carbon copies of the invitations.⁸⁶

By the end of the decade, 37 circles with a membership of over 770 women were listed as part of the Southern District WMS. The organization was clearly thriving.

Central District

Although home to the oldest of the mission societies and sales, those of the Carson/Mountain Lake, Minnesota churches, the Central District Women's Missionary Service was the last of the District Services to formally organize. Interest in a unified organization was evidenced by at least some Central District women who had contact with the Southern District WMS. At the missionary rally sponsored by the Southern District WMS in Joes, Colorado, April of 1959, a circle from Paxton, Nebraska asked to join the Southern District's WMS because of the lack of a similar organization in their own district. Their request was granted.⁸⁷ That same year, Mrs. Marion Kliever, Secretary of the Southern District WMS, forwarded information about the WMS to Mrs. Wayne Paul of Harvey, North Dakota.⁸⁸ However, it was at the request of the District Board of Reference and Counsel Committee that formal organization actually took place.⁸⁹

The District Conference had begun to include information about the various women's mission societies in their annual statistical reports in 1956. These figures are significant in comparison to total mission and relief giving for those same years. For example, the total Conference giving to foreign missions (both Mennonite Brethren and other), home missions, relief and the endowment fund was \$86,804.38 in 1956. That same year, thirteen sewing circles reported income of \$10,599.49, most of which would have been channeled into foreign and home missions, relief, and local church projects.⁹⁰

At the 1959 District Conference session, the General Conference Board of Foreign Missions presented to the Conference a "Statement of Our Fundamental Concept and Purpose of Missions," which delegated the responsibility for outfitting missionaries to the local constituency.⁹¹ The "mother church" of the missionary, "through the channels of the respective district or provincial conference, or, if necessary, "by inviting other neighboring churches to participate" was responsible for the provision of equipment needed by outgoing missionaries.⁹² In addition, the statement said:

The missionary societies of the respective church or district are requested to assume the responsibility for all the personal effects in the line of linen, clothing and personal household effects necessary for a normal maintenance of a household on the basis of average family standards.

The constituency further provides for an outgoing missionary family the amount not to exceed \$1200 in cash for the purpose of equipment which the missionary is responsible to provide as his own property.⁹³

Missionaries home on furlough were to be given not more than \$750 assistance for a family, and \$500 for a "single sister" in preparation for return to the field.⁹⁴

On October 10, 1960, during the District Conference at Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and at the recommendation of the District's Reference and Counsel Committee, Central District women met to formally organize a missionary

service. Their report to the delegation stated that they had accepted the recommendations of the Reference and Counsel and the establishment of a temporary committee until they could set up a constitution.⁹⁵ Mrs. Waldo Dick, newly elected chairperson, also reported that:

Our responsibilities will be mainly to work together as women's societies of the Central District Conference in outfitting our missionaries when they leave for the foreign field and other projects as they will arise.⁹⁶

During the following year the newly formed organization met twice. They reported to the delegation at the District Conference held October, 1961, that during their first year they had "been able to outfit the out-going missionaries from our district," and that they had also established a newsletter, The Challenger, as a "means of contact between societies and committee giving the immediate needs of missionaries."⁹⁷ Their financial report indicated receipt of \$2,141.46 from twenty-three churches, and disbursements to missionaries amounting to \$1,770.00.⁹⁸

Interestingly, although continuing to count membership, the Conference statistics discontinued the financial reporting of the missionary circles after the WMS organized. The yearbook for 1960 reported mission society membership of 415 women among 14 churches and income of \$7,065.00 from 12 churches. Missionary society membership reported in 1961 was 622 among 20 churches. Given the reports of individual circle activity published in The Challenger, considerable income was still flowing from the societies through the churches.⁹⁹

At their annual meeting on November 8, 1962, the WMS adopted a budget of \$2,800 for the following year; \$1,000 for foreign missions, \$800 for home missions, \$200 for relief, and \$800 for Christian education.¹⁰⁰ Other recommendations included the continued outfitting of missionaries from the district, the assignment of missionaries to the various churches for prayer

and support, and a decision to have the M.C.C. relief project letter sent to each of the societies.¹⁰¹ Also during 1962, the Executive Committee drew up a constitution which they proceeded to distribute to the various circles for their approval.¹⁰² According to the preamble, Central District women were organizing because they were "interested in the welfare of its [Central District] Mission Program, Relief Program, and Education Program," and to lend their "assistance in the promoting of its general interests."¹⁰³

Conclusion

As we have seen, the united efforts of the Women's Missionary Services grew out of the work of the individual societies. The development of each organization reflected its times and the activities of its district. In 1948, the Pacific District women organized in the wake of World War II and the combined relief efforts mounted by the churches. Women wanted to unite and increase their work. In 1954, relief work had waned but the Mennonite Brethren home and foreign mission program was strong. The Southern District women viewed themselves as loyal conference women, and thus united as a funding source for foreign and home missions, and education. The Central District WMS organized in 1960 at the request of the District leadership and shortly after the Board of Missions/Services assigned outfitting to the home churches and district of the missionaries.

Each organization took a slightly different form. The Pacific District women worked with a large executive board and coordinated efforts for relief, missions, the Home for the Aged, and schools located within the district. Large amounts of money flowed through their treasury. The Southern District women worked with a much smaller organization and kept their joint projects to a minimum, however they were instrumental in setting up the unified study program eventually adopted by all three WMS organizations. The Central

District women also worked with a small committee that fostered the work of home and foreign missions across a sparsely populated district, particularly through their excellent newsletter, *The Challenger*. All assigned missionaries to individual groups for prayer and support.

Mission personnel and pastors regularly exhorted women to serve, but often questioned their desire to be a part of decision-making bodies. Sermons and devotionals delivered at the various annual meetings are often very telling, and need be studied as a part of the larger question of women's full participation in the life of the church.¹⁰⁴ In many cases these messages simply reflect an era, and should be read in that context. However, the messages that women were responsible for suffering and sacrifice, that they were to "stand in the gap" and "lead the cause of Christ," need to be evaluated for their impact on the lives and service of Mennonite Brethren women.

I began this project out of a conviction that the story of the women's missionary societies was an important part of Mennonite Brethren church history, and to provide a witness to the commitment of Mennonite Brethren women to the work of the church. They did what they could with the resources they had at hand. They did what they could given the restrictions placed on women for service in the church. Their story needs to be incorporated into the historical record and memory of Mennonite Brethren.

NOTES

1. John Cornelius Penner and Adolf I. Frantz, Through the Years: A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Shafter, California, Its Organization and Its Development, 1918-1968 (N.p.: n.p., 1968), 37.

2. "Conference in Nebr. Oct. 19, 1881," Yearbooks of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches: Sessions 1 - 22, 1879 - 1900, trans. Evangeline Kroeker and Robert Seibel (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), 14.

3. In 1895 the first missionaries sent out by the North American Mennonite Brethren, Henry and Elizabeth Unruh Kohfield, went to work among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma. They were joined in 1896 by the first single woman sent out by the conference--Maria B. Regier. Mrs. H. T. Esau [Anna Hiebert Esau], First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 28-39. In 1899 the first foreign missionary contingent was sent to India. J.A. Toews quotes A.E. Janzen as follows: "The initial group of four M.B. missionaries to India was made up of a preacher and his wife, a teacher and a nurse. By way of preparation and divine calling this group had embodied within its number the potential of the Lord's method - preach, teach, heal; a preacher, a teacher, a nurse were in the staff." This group was composed of one man, the preacher, and three women. The four were Mr. and Mrs. N.N. [Susie Wiebe] Hiebert, Elizabeth Neufeld, and Anna Suderman. John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 401.

4. 60th Anniversary: 1893-1953, Mennonite Brethren Church, Corn, Oklahoma (N.p.: n.p., 1953), n.p.

5. In an account prepared for their seventy-fifth anniversary (1980), Esther Jost wrote, "During the early years of the Reedley Church, several women were sensitive to the need of supplementing the missionary efforts of the church. In November 1913, the women met in the home of Mrs. H.R. Janzen, organized a Nahverein (sewing society), and elected Mrs. Janzen as their chairman. Eager to begin their services, the women donated money and materials for their first missionary project. This work was called to the attention of the church by Pastor John Berg, and as a result, the Women's Missionary Society was accepted as an organization of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church. At the end of the year, the society sent \$50.00 each to missionaries H. C. Bartel and F. J. Wiens in China and \$125.00 to the missionary field in India. The highlight of the group was their mission sale in 1919, which netted \$1,545.00. This money was used for missionary and relief purposes in India and Russia." Esther Jost, The Church Alive in its 75th Year: 1905 - 1980 (N.p.: n.p., 1980), 105.

6. Herman J. Neufeld and Mrs. Neufeld, "The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Buhler, Kansas: (Diss., Tabor College, 1949), 74.

7. Ibid.
8. "History of the Sewing Circles of the M.B. Church of Shafter," Shafter M.B. Church Records, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Calif., (Hereafter Shafter M.B.), Microfilm roll 77, pp. 1405-1406. Mrs. P. P. Rempel served as the group's Bible teacher until March of 1942, and was apparently held in very high regard by the membership. Among the listing of projects is payment for a caretaker for Mrs. Rempel's yard, the installation of a cooler, and the secret remodeling of her house to install a bathroom while Mrs. Rempel and her daughter were taken to the beach for a short vacation. The unnamed historian wrote, "we don't know who was happier, Mrs. Rempel and Ann [her daughter], or those of us that had a share in it."
9. Sixtieth Anniversary, n.p.
10. Ibid.
11. Esther Jost, 107.
12. Year Book of the 42nd General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at Buhler, Kansas, May 26-30, 1943 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 64.
13. Year Book of the 36th Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at Reedley, California, November 18 to 21, 1945 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 40. The cost of furnishing a room was \$250.00.
14. Year Book of the 39th Southern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at Hillsboro, Kansas, October 16-19, 1948 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 35. A contribution of \$50.00 is noted in the financial report.
15. J. J. Seibel and Mrs. J. J. Seibel, Fiftieth Anniversary: Mennonite Brethren Church, Harvey, North Dakota, 1898-1948 (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), 14.
16. Seibel and Seibel, 11. Total income for this time period is recorded as \$4,281.98. \$2,704.01 went for local projects, while \$1,587.05 was channeled into mission-related projects (\$800.00 - Care packages, \$376.25 - "missions, widows and needy," and \$410.80 - "mission schools, children's homes and radio work."
17. Joseph A. Kleinsasser, A History of Bethel Mennonite Brethren Church, Yale, South Dakota (Sioux Falls, SD: J. A. Kleinsasser, 1979), 81.
18. Joseph Kleinsasser, 80.
19. Sixtieth Anniversary, n.p.
20. 50th Anniversary: Zion Mennonite Brethren Church, Dinuba, California (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), 16.
21. Mrs. Henry Martens [Lydia Martens], "Fifth Anniversary." file "Scrapbook, Volume I, 1948-1958." Pacific District Conference of Mennonite

Brethren Churches Women's Missionary Service. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Calif. (Hereafter PDC WMS).

22. She was also able to provide the following data: "Ten of the societies have used the method of the mission sale for income. Eight groups sew only for missionaries and relief, while some of the ten that have the sales sew for relief also. Estimated cash income is approximately \$20,000, plus materials for relief estimated about again as much, amounting to a total of about \$40,000. Projects that have received support are foreign missions, with the largest amount going into the general treasury, helping outgoing missionaries. Other projects are: Relief, MCC, as well as some home relief; home missions, such as: our local churches working among migrants, child evangelism, Home for the Aged in Reedley, Tabor College, P.B.I., and Immanuel Bible School. Then there are such additional projects as Red Cross, Release Hour, North Carolina Mission, Christian Radio Programs, Los Angeles Children's Home, Grace Children's Home, American Bible Society." Given subsequent reports in the district year books, these estimates were probably high. Martens, "Fifth Anniversary." PDC WMS.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. In her fifth anniversary piece, Martens recalled that "with only a half day of conference left, numerous people voiced their opinion that we do something about organizing before the conference ended. Since I had been asked to make the survey report, I was asked to take the initiative and call for a meeting the next day, but the time was so short and everyone was anxious to leave for their homes, so we set a date to meet two or three weeks later in Reedley to organize." Martens, "Fifth Anniversary." PDC WMS.

26. Ibid.

27. Waldo Wiebe to J.B. Toews, November 12, 1948. Microfilm Roll 77, p. 1387. Shafter M.B. Church, Shafter, Calif. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Calif. (Hereafter Shafter M.B.).

28. Ibid.

29. Meeting of the Shafter Relief Workers, November 3, 1948. Microfilm Roll 77, p. 1560. Shafter M.B. A history of the sewing circle records the event thus: "On November 4, 1948, we planned to go to Reedley where the different sewing circles met to plan and to organize a Women's Missionary Service, but Rev. Waldo Wiebe didn't want us to go so we didn't, but as most of the other circles were present, a Women's Missionary Service was organized on November 14, 1948." "History of the Sewing Circle of the M. B. Church of Shafter 1923-1966." Microfilm Roll 77, p. 1410. Shafter M.B.

30. "We'll admit that we felt a bit discouraged," wrote Lydia Martens, "then, on November 14, Sunday afternoon, making last minute preparations for the meeting, we met our pastor outside, he greeted us in his usual friendly way, encouraged us just to be calm, go ahead and wished us God's blessing. I cannot tell you what a comfort his words meant to me at that hour. It was a balm to our souls, and we found new courage to go ahead." Martens, "Fifth Anniversary." PDC WMS.

31. The main text of the letter reads, "After consulting with the brethren H.R. Wiens and B.J. Braun, we felt it would not be a proper procedure to read your letter to the group for as much as the Conference had passed a resolution recommending that this organization be effected. We personally honor the expression of your position, but felt that we were not authorized to express a public opposition towards the matter which had been ordered by the Conference body. It would be the proper procedure to register such an opinion to the Conference instead of to the sisters who have preceded on the strength of our Conference recommendation. I trust that you will understand us in our judgement." J.B. Toews to Waldo Wiebe, November 18, 1948. Microfilm Roll 77, p. 1388. Shafter M.B.

32. Mrs. Martens later wrote, "We also thank the Lord for those who were opposed, for it caused us to pray much, and search our hearts to see whether we were really seeking only the glory of God. We praise His name that prayer changes things, for some of those who were most opposed, after they fully understood what we were seeking to accomplish, are in full accord with us, and help in the work that we are trying to promote." Martens, "Fifth Anniversary." PDC WMS.

33. Chairman, Mrs. David Letkeman [Mary?] of Dinuba; Vice-Chairman, Mrs. H. R. Martens [Lydia] of Reedley; Secretary/Treasurer, Mrs. Abe Gerbrandt of San Jose;) and a committee to work with them (Mrs. Susie Issac of Shafter, Mrs. Dan [Emma] Bartel of Rosedale, Calif., Mrs. J. J. [Agatha?] Heinrichs of Dallas, Oregon, Mrs. H. G. Wiens of Fresno, Calif., and Mrs. Art [Rachel?] Loewen of Winton, Calif. Organizational Meeting of the M.B. Missionary Service, November 14, 1948, Reedley, California. file "Annual Meetings 1948-1959," PDC WMS.

34. Ibid.

35. The financial report for the annual meeting held in 1950 indicates receipt of \$39.20 during 1949, and \$0.0 up to that date in 1950. Women's Missionary Service Meeting, October 31, 1950, Shafter, California. file "Annual Meetings, 1948-58." PDC WMS.

36. Women's Missionary Service meeting, October 31, 1950, Shafter, California. PDC WMS. Although the name M.B. Missionary Service was chosen, the organization has invariably been called the Women's Missionary Service (WMS), beginning with the November 13, 1951, annual meeting minutes. Article I of the first constitution accepted (1954), notes the name as the "M.B. Women's Missionary Service of the Pacific District Conference." Constitution, M.B. Women's Missionary Service. file "Constitutions, 1954-1974." PDC WMS.

37. Year Book of the 41st Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, Held at Shafter, California, October 28 to November 2, 1950 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 21.

38. Ibid.

39. M.B. Women's Missionary Service Executive Board Meeting, November 13, 1954. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS.

40. Constitution, M.B. Women's Missionary Service. file "Constitutions, 1954-1974." PDC WMS.

41. The eight-member committee included the president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, corresponding secretary, and the chairs of the Missionary Sewing Committee, the M.C.C. Committee, the Home for the Aged Committee, and the Missionary Program Committee. Note the change in nomenclature from Chairman to President. Ibid.

42. M.B. Women's Missionary Service Meeting, November 15, 1954. file "Annual Meetings, 1948-1959." PDC WMS.

43. M.B. Women's Missionary Service Meeting, November 15, 1954. file "Annual Meetings, 1948-1959." PDC WMS.

44. Missionary Rally, March 17, 1955, at Shafter, Calif. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS.

45. This is the first record of membership assessment for a WMS project. M.B. Missionary Service Executive Committee meeting, April 12, 1955. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS.

46. M.B. Missionary Society Executive Committee Report for the Year 1955. file "Annual Meetings, 1948-1959." PDC WMS.

47. Women's Missionary Society Meeting, October 31, 1950. file "Annual Meetings, 1948-1959." PDC WMS.

48. For example, circles were informed of Mrs. Herman Warkentin's needs (a missionary widowed in India) and encouraged to send cash donations directly to Mrs. Warkentin. M.B. Women's Missionary Service Executive Committee meeting, April 17, 1953. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS.

49. Ibid.

50. M.B. Missionary Service Executive Board meeting, November 10, 1956. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960," and M.B. Missionary Service meeting, November 12, 1956, Dallas, Oregon. file "Annual Meetings, 1943-1959." PDC WMS.

51. M.B. Missionary Service Executive Meeting, November 21, 1957. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS.

52. "To the loyal thinking conference women the fact that there was no unity, no conference budget on the women's level, and very little understanding of conference needs presented an ever increasing concern. Not nearly all of the money collected in the circles was being given to conference mission work. More and more independent organizations finding the Mennonite Brethren women easy prey were presenting their causes in glowing language oft with heartrending sincerity, and these organizations were cashing in on ever increasing sums of money. The result was that loyalty to conference causes was suffering and lack of funds was hampering conference work." Hiebert, Waldo D., "History of the Women's Missionary Service of the Southern District of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America," (unpublished paper, 1956), p. 5. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Calif.

53. Hiebert attributes their failure to meet at the next conference to a lack of vision on the part of the hosting congregation's women. He writes that the Hillsboro women would have been happy to organize the previous year, but "felt that taking the initiative would not be well received since they were the host church." Waldo D. Hiebert, 6.

54. This may have been due to the presence of Marie Gerbrandt (Mrs. J. J. Gerbrandt). Hiebert notes that she served as chairperson of the Senior Women's Group at the Hillsboro M.B. church and "had lived in California for many years and was, therefore, familiar with the Pacific District Women's Organization." Waldo D. Hiebert, 7.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Other officers included Mrs. L. J. [Helen] Franz, Vice-Chairman; and Mrs. Waldo [Rachel] Hiebert, Secretary-Treasurer. Ibid.

58. Women's Missionary Service: 1954-1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

59. Waldo D. Hiebert, 8.

60. Year Book, 45th Session, Southern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, Held at Fairview, Oklahoma, M.B. Church, November 6-9, 1954 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren-Publishing House, n.d.), 54.

61. Ibid.

62. Mrs. Waldo Hiebert for the Executive Committee to members of the Women's Missionary Service, January 18, 1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid. The circles responded positively. The treasurer's report for November 1, 1954 to October 31, 1955, the first year of formal organization, listed the collection of \$1,842.00 for the mission projects (\$1,045 for the maternity hospital and \$765 for the Denver congregation). Treasurer's Report, November 1, 1954 - October 31, 1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

65. Women's Missionary Service Executive Committee meeting, September 22, 1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

66. Women's Missionary Service meeting, October 24, 1955, Buhler, Kansas. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

67. Ibid.

68. Partial Report and Decisions of the Business Meeting of the Women's Missionary Service of the Southern District Conference, October 24, 1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

69. Partial Report and Decisions of the Business Meeting of the Women's Missionary Service of the Southern District Conference, October 24, 1955. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

70. Annual Report, Southern District Prayer Chairman, October 22, 1956. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

71. "Southern District Women Sponsor Mission Rallies," The Christian Leader, 22 April 1958: 21.

72. Year Book, 47th Session, Southern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at Corn, Oklahoma, October 20-24, 1956 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), p. 100.

73. In March of 1956 the Executive Committee members discussed "the question as to what we should do about requests for finances which come to us on the sidelines.... Such as requests from Texas and Arkansas." Women's Missionary Service Executive Committee meeting, March 15, 1956. folder "No. 11." SDC WMS.

74. Ibid.

75. Helen Franz to Ferne Hiebert, January 14, 1958. folder "No. 13." SDC WMS.

76. This may be due to the timing of organizational starts. The Missionary Service in the Pacific District organized in the wake of World War II and the massive relief efforts mounted by both the Mennonite Brethren Board of General Welfare and Mennonite Central Committee. Relief work may not have had the same urgency in the mid-1950's.

77. Handwritten notes, "The Works Various Circles Do, Presented at Conference Meeting, 1957." folder "No. 13." SDC WMS.

78. Women's Missionary Service meeting, October 20, 1958, Enid, Oklahoma. folder "No. 13." SDC WMS.

79. Women's Missionary Service Financial Report, October 20, 1958, to October 19, 1959. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

80. Women's Missionary Service Ballot for 1959-1960 Projects. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

81. Letter from A.E. Janzen to Mrs. C.H. Fast, May 19, 1959. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

82. Ibid.

83. Women's Missionary Service meeting, October 19, 1959, Hillsboro, Kansas. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

84. J.A. Toews, 192.

85. Elfreda Fast to Esther [Ebel], February 14, 1959. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

86. Mrs. Marion [Esther] Kliewer to Mrs. Pete E. Heinrichs, February 27, 1959; and to Mrs. Menno Prieb, February 27, 1959. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

87. Women's Missionary Service Officers Meeting, September 11, 1959, Hillsboro, Kansas. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

88. Mrs. Kliewer wrote, "I am not sure if you were the lady who called at the Board of Foreign Missions Office this past week, but I think you might be. For your interest and information I am sending you a few pieces of literature concerning our Southern District Women's Missionary Service. Enclosed are the recommendations which must have been adopted in 1955 and which I believe have been sort of a guide since then." Mrs. Marion Kliewer to Mrs. Wayne Faul, March 28, 1959. folder "No. 15." SDC WMS.

89. Year Book, 51st Session, Central District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Convening at Mountain Lake, Minnesota October 8-11, 1960 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 49.

90. Year Book of the 48th Central District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Held at the Carson Mennonite Brethren Church, Delft, Minn., September 28-October, 1957 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 11.

91. Year Book, 50th Session, Central District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Convening at Lustre, Montana October 10-13, 1959 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 50-51.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., 50-51.

94. Ibid., 51.

95. Officers elected to serve were Mrs. Waldo Dick of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, Chairman for a three-year term; Mrs. Rueben Dirks of Huron, South Dakota Vice-Chairman for a two-year term; Mrs. Clifford Reimche, Martin, North Dakota, Secretary-Treasurer for a two-year term; and Mrs. Henry Regier of Madrid, Nebraska, Devotional leader for a one-year term. Year Book, 51st Session, Central District Conference, 49.

96. Ibid.

97. Year Book, 52nd Session, Central District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Convening at Mountain Lake, Minnesota, October 7-10, 1961 (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, n.d.), 52.

98. Ibid., 52-53. Records note \$500 to Rosella Toews, \$400 to Martha Kroeker, \$750 to John and Viola Wiebe, and \$20 to the Kenneth Mungers.

99. For example, the Rosehill M.B. Circle of Munich, North Dakota, submitted the following report of their work to The Challenger: "We support a Korean orphan. Each member pledges \$10.00 a month. We also send out Christmas bundles to the M.C.C. Each member donates. We have had a yearly mission sale. Items were donated and also sewed at our Circle. Our money then is

distributed to various places, as: Back to the Bible Broadcast, other radio broadcasts, and some if our missionaries are remembered with a special gift. One missionary whom we try to remember in a very special way is Miss Mathilda Wall who grew up in Munich and was a member of the Rosehill church. Some of our projects consisted of gathering money for our new church parsonage, to buy drapes, paint, refrigerator, etc. The parsonage was built two years ago. We served lunches at auction sales, funerals, wedding receptions and baby showers. We have helped outfit several missionary couples as the Lord laid it upon our hearts. Also at our meetings we do embroidery work, quilt and tie quilts, letters from various missionaries are read and missionaries are remembered in prayer. There are also many others projects in which we have tried to help support the work of the Lord, such as the American Sunday School Mission, the American Bible Society, etc." Mrs. Ed Fadenrecht, "Societies Report," The Challenger November 1962.

100. "Central District Women's Missionary Services Meet at Henderson, Nebraska," The Challenger November 1962.

101. Ibid.

102. Mrs. Waldo Dick, "W.M.S. President Writes:" The Challenger November 1962.

103. Their stated purpose was as follows: "A. To promote spiritual growth and to become inspired for service through our fellowship of women in our conference. B. To promote the program of Missions, Relief, and Education of the District Area, and General Conference by: (1) giving our prayer and moral support; (2) fostering of interest in this program; (3) giving our financial support." The officers were set as president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and devotional chairman. Constitution of the Mennonite Brethren Women's Missionary Service of the Central District Conference (N.p.: n.p., 1963), 2-4. file "folder No. 22." SDC WMS.

104. For example, notes on a sermon by G. W. Peters at a missionary rally in 1956 report that "After reading Acts Chapter 9 verses 36 and to the end he showed us the importance of the work of the Missionary Service. Comparing the work of the Missionary Service and the life and work of Dorcas. Also that God is keeping a record and will give the reward." Missionary Rally, March 15, 1956. file "Executive Meetings, 1949-1960." PDC WMS. J.B. Toews, was a frequent speaker at WMS rallies and conferences, first as a pastor, then as Mission Board staff, and later as president of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. Minutes report the following sermon summary: "J. B. Toews of the Mission Office brought the challenge of the afternoon and based his message on Matt. 15:21-28. He spoke on the many women of faith listed in the Bible. When a crucial hour came in the history of man there was always a woman of faith to stand in the gap.... The work of women should not be minimized. Womanhood of our generation is awakening to the responsibility they have. Women are not to feel secondary but to lead the Cause of Christ to victory." Women's Missionary Service of the Southern District Meeting, n.d., Cordell, Oklahoma. folder "No. 19." SDC WMS. On another occasion, Dr. Jacob A. Loewen informed WMS members that "Home is built around mother. In mother the children find a pattern of sacrifice." Women's Missionary Service of the Southern District, Annual Meeting, October 20, 1958, Enid, Oklahoma. folder "No. 13." SDC WMS.