

## The Christmas bundle dress quilt

by Helen Glick

In the devastation that followed World War II, one of Mennonite Central Committee's responses was to send Christmas bundles to children in Europe.

Johanna Sutter received one of the bundles in 1947 when she was a little girl in Germany. In addition to the sweater, towel, pencils, notebook, toothbrush and other mundane but very welcome items, there was a new dress! How exciting! Inside the Christmas bundle there was also a Christmas card. The bundle was sent by Lola and Marie Brunk and their Sunday School Class from Pike Mennonite Church in Elida, Ohio

As a young adult, Johanna came to the United States to do a term of service with MCC's Trainee Program. She later moved permanently to Elkhart County, Indiana, where she taught school. She is currently a member of Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen.

In the 1980s she searched for and found the Brunk sisters in Ohio, wanting to thank them for that long ago Christmas bundle. During the visit, one of them asked, "Do you remember the dress from your Christmas bundle? We made it. It was one of five we made that year for Christmas bundles."

"Yes, of course," Johanna replied.

They took her to their sewing room and looked at the scraps from those five dresses. Johanna easily picked out the turquoise, yellow, and lavender fabric of her dress.

The sisters had a surprise in mind. Using the scraps from all five dresses they made Johanna a star quilt.

Johanna's story was told at the 2018 Michiana Mennonite Relief Sale Quilt Auction. The quilt, impeccably pieced, expertly quilted,

and still beautiful, was displayed at the auction.

Donations were asked for, remembering all the Christmas bundles, hygiene kits, school kits, relief kits, sewing kits and the people to whom these kits bring comfort and hope. The donations to MCC totaled \$7,250.

Johanna, now retired from teaching, volunteers regularly in Goshen at The Depot MCC Material Resource Center. She purchases items and assembles today's versions of Christmas bundles to send to children in need, often because of war or conflict. She knows the excitement and hope of receiving one.

*Helen Glick is quilt coordinator for the Michiana Mennonite Relief Sale in Goshen, Ind.* 



*Joanna Sutter shows off the star quilt made from scraps of dresses sewn for Christmas bundles, one of which she received as a child in Germany. Behind Joanna are other kits assembled in the Great Lakes MCC Material Resource Center.*

## Ames Mennonite Church member creates quilts for local clinic

Ames (Iowa) Mennonite Church member Phyllis Schrag is a quilt maker. She brought 16 machine-pieced, machine-quilted and machine-bound baby quilts to the 4 pm church service on September 30. At that time, members blessed the quilts. Part of the service included the following prayer which is found in the **Mennonite Hymnal**:

“Savior of the earth’s children,  
you came as a little child  
to lead us to wisdom and love.  
When you grew up,

you welcomed the children  
and told us the kingdom belongs to them.  
Call us to a child’s tenderness,  
humility, energy, and love,  
for Jesus’ sake. AMEN”

The following Monday, the baby quilts were donated to the OBRIA medical clinics in Ames, formerly “Informed Choices.” OBRIA is a fully-licensed community care clinic providing professional medical consultations, education, testing and prenatal care for women. ©



Ames Mennonite Church members Kathy and Dave Tucker, Pastor Keith Schrag and Larry Schrag pray a blessing on the quilts and the babies who will receive them.



Quiltmaker Phyllis Schrag, of Ames Mennonite Church, kneels beside the quilts she made for the church to donate to OBRIA.

## New book explores transitions from military service to antiwar activism

Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite church member Julie Hart, along with Anjel N. Stough-Hunter, recently published *Pathways to Pacifism and Antiwar Activism among US Veterans: The Role of Moral Identity in Personal Transformation*. The book, available from Amazon, seeks to answer the question of how and why some military personnel become antiwar activists. According to Bethel College emeritus theology professor Duane Friesen, “Through in-depth interviews

with 114 US veterans who have become antiwar activists, Hart and Stough-Hunter make three important contributions to an informed citizenry,” including empathy for the trauma many veterans have experienced and practical recommendations to foster healing and reintegrate veterans into civilian life. Julie Hart, professor of sociology and peace & justice at Ohio Dominican University in Columbus is available to speak on the book. ©



# Russel and Lora Oyer give legacy gift to CDC

A lifetime of giving for Russel and Lora Oyer—to the church and to their communities—included an estate gift to Central District Conference. The gift, received earlier this year, represented the commitment both Russel and Lora had to living lives of faith and their wish to acknowledge the gifts they themselves had received.

**R**ussel was a medical doctor who practiced for 42 years, first in Sugarcreek, Ohio, and then for 37 years in Chenoa, Ill. In a solo practice in a rural community, he worked long and sometimes unpredictable hours. But he did much more than seeing patients who came to him. He served as physician for school athletics in Chenoa, started immunization clinics in the Chenoa schools, and assisted in community efforts to organize emergency medical services in Chenoa. He also served on a committee to organize and establish the McLean County Medical Clinic where the homeless, the under-insured and the poor could receive medical care.

In the story of his life that was shared with CDC, this summary is included:

He wanted to be remembered simply as one whose life was mixed with failure and perhaps a few successes. He wanted to be remembered as one who struggled with the hard questions about ultimate meaning and about the vast mystery of the universe in which humans find themselves. As he moved through life from youth to old age he became convinced that peace and nonviolence were the most crucial needs of Planet Earth and its people. He believed the quest for justice, tolerance, perpetual goodwill, equality and peace needed to mobilize the dedicated efforts of every man, woman and child.

**L**ora combined being a wife and the mother of three sons with a devotion to music and involvement in women's groups in the congregation, conference and denomination. After graduating from Bluffton College (now

University), she taught music for several years. When the family lived in Sugarcreek, Lora directed the First Mennonite Church choir and a community choir. In Illinois, she directed the choir at Meadows Mennonite Church and initiated an annual Advent choir service. In 1980 the Meadows Church recognized her outstanding and dedicated contributions to the church, especially through music, with a special event in her honor.

**L**ora also was extensively involved in the women's organizations of Central District Conference and the General Conference Mennonite Church. She served as president of the GC Women in Mission organization and remained involved in leadership for more than a decade, traveling extensively across the US and Canada. Her travels also included helping with program planning for the 1984 Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France.

She long recognized the desire of women to have their voices contribute to leadership in the church, and she made an effort to be in touch with and listen to younger women. This, combined with her attention to peace, justice and social issues, led to her recognition by Bluffton as Outstanding Alumna in 1996.

**T**ogether and individually, Russel and Lora each gave much to their congregation and their community as well as the church beyond their immediate setting. Their strong marriage and the family that included their sons, Frederick, Rodney and Joel, were at the center of their lives, giving them strength as well as motivation for their many involvements. Their gift to Central District Conference is a sign of their strong faith and it will carry forward into the future their investment in the work of the church that was so important in their lives.

*(continued on page 4)*


Russel Oyer (continued)

Russel Oyer spent time writing as a way of reflecting on his values and life. At his memorial service, this was one of two poems read.

WHAT CANDLE LIT IN DARKNESS

What candle lit in darkness  
Can illumine the path  
Leading to compassion and goodwill?  
What source of inspiration  
Can plumb the spirit’s depths?  
When days are passed in fearful storm  
Is there an anchor holding fast?  
What fate is it that’s waiting  
Where unknowns block the seeing?  
A reality, elusive and ill-defined, lingers,  
In somber mood I pause to ponder

A transcendent realm of meaning;  
My vision dims, but I think I see a candle  
Glowing with warm and welcoming light!  
It will be my guide and hope,  
It, perchance, can show the way  
For all who seek the highest good,  
Who, with strong confidence aim to seek  
A healing balm and wholeness  
For our sorely troubled and disordered world.

**Note:** Central District Conference has tithed the legacy gift from Russell and Lora Oyer. To honor Lora’s gifts in and contributions to music, CDC has given 10 percent of the gift to *Voices Together*, the new hymnal project. 

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church celebrates 60 years



*In the 60th anniversary worship service at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., on September 30, a portion of Ephesians 3 was read in languages representing where people in the congregation are from: (L-R) Febri Kristiani in her Indonesian language, Theo Odhiambo in his African language; Yukino Ohyama in Japanese; Lara Claassen in French as a reminder that Paris mission workers Neal and Janie Blough are members of the congregation; Louise Claassen in German; and Pastor Jake Hess in Spanish. Marcia Yoder-Schrock, pastor of Hively from 1982 to 1991, was the preacher for the service. Following worship, congregational historian Rich Preheim interviewed two members who were charter members of the congregation: Marilyn Klassen from Elkhart, and Hulda Classen, now living in Philadelphia Pa.*

Financial report

October 31, 2018

Year-to-date contributed support . . . .	\$54,963
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$71,333
Difference between giving and plan	-\$16,369
Year-to-date expenses . . . . .	\$73,613
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$78,169
Difference between expenses	
and plan . . . . .	-\$4,555

After four months of activity in our financial year, contributions continue to lag behind the expectations of our spending plan. We will be looking for improvement over the next several months. On the expense side we are very much on target, with all categories within budget.

*Report provided by Tim Lind, conference treasurer*

# Doug's Mug: Strings in my mug

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

I have a mug full of strings and threads, figuratively speaking. I also confess to being a fan of the TV sitcom “Big Bang Theory.” Blame my son and daughter-in-law! A reference that often comes up in “Big Bang” is “string theory.”



I'm not a physicist so I really didn't understand string theory. The other day I was reading a book recommended by a pastor and it mentioned “string theory.” So I Googled it. Here's my attempt to understand it. Rather than identifying subatomic particles as “points,” the theory states they act rather like “strings.” These strings bend, turn and change position based on the forces around them. These “strings” aren't independent little beasts. Rather, they are interdependent and react according to all the forces around them. (I'm sure all you scientists out there are laughing by now.)

The author of the book goes on to suggest that if people “change their position, they will function differently; change the forces and they will appear to have different natures.” (*The Myth of the Shiksa and Other Essays* by Edwin H. Friedman, p. 166-170)

One way we Anabaptists historically tried to control our positions in society and the forces around us was to cluster together and separate ourselves from the forces and locations that threatened us or “our way of life.” We like it when all our little strings spin and bend and turn in beautiful unison according to our understanding of Jesus.

For 21st-century CDC Anabaptists, clustering and separating isn't our primary way of being in the world. We are scattered and have multiple forces acting upon us, pushing, pulling, and impacting us in various ways. This could be interpreted as either a threat or an opportunity. I like to imagine it as an opportunity.


Assuming that the “forces” radiating from us originate from the Christ-likeness in each of us,

then our simple presence in the world has the opportunity to affect the actions and positions of others around us in positive ways. The way we “are” in the world ultimately affects the way the world “is.” Given the hostile, divisive and violent tone of our culture, the Spirit of Christ-likeness is a transformative force our world needs.

Paul, in a way, was also a “string theorist.” However, the strings he had in mind were threads of a garment. In Colossians 3:12 and 14 Paul states, “As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

One last “string theory.” As a child I remember going to “sewing days” at Grace Mennonite Church. I remember playing underneath the quilts being lovingly sewn and knotted by the gathering of women, with nary a care in the world. The quilt pieces, recycled from clothing or bought at a discount from a store, were miraculously transformed into something both beautiful and practical. Quilt symbolism is rich in Mennonite tradition, representing frugality, generosity, hospitality, creativity, community, diversity and so much more. Perhaps quilt iconography can help us see the presence of God's shalom more clearly and wrap us with the threads of peace as we faithfully make our way in this world.

As violence threatens even places of worship, perhaps sentries wrapped in quilts, hymnals drawn, will stand at the ready in the doorways of our churches. How would that “force” bear witness to our faith in Christ?

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 6:23-24) 

*“It's a common thread that binds us, and our work will never cease, till we stitch this world together piece by piece”*

*– John McCutcheon, “Piece by Piece” on “Storied Ground” album.*



## Ordination



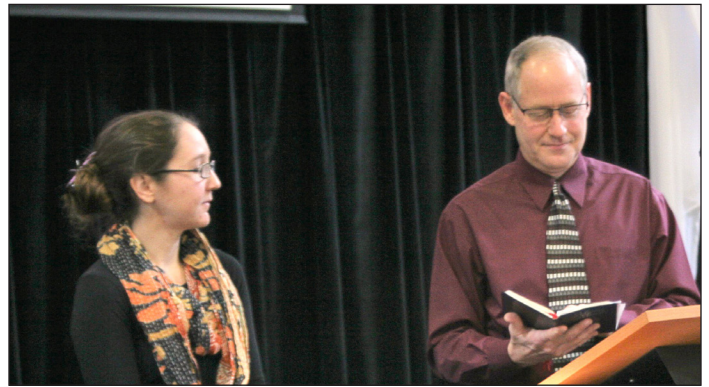
*Melissa Florer-Bixler was ordained at Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church on Sunday, Nov. 18. She serves as pastor of the congregation. Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister, officiated.*

## Commissioning



*Tom Kauffman (right) was commissioned as the Transitional Pastor at Paoli Mennonite Church on November 11. Because the congregation is dually-affiliated, Dan Miller, conference minister for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, participated along with Doug Luginbill.*

## Installation



*Rachel Taylor was installed as Intergenerational Pastor at Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church on Sunday, Nov. 18. Doug Luginbill officiated.*

## Licensing toward ordination



*Catherine Lee was licensed toward ordination at Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship on Sunday, Nov. 18. She serves as a hospice chaplain in the community. Doug Luginbill officiated.*

## Installation and licensing

*Anna Yoder Schlabach was installed as Pastor of Pastoral Care and Worship at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on Sunday, Nov. 18. Anna also was licensed toward ordination. Kay Bontrager Singer, member of the CDC Ministerial Committee, officiated. Anna serves as president-elect of CDC.*



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