

Waltner continues, “My parents, born in the Depression, taught us to look for rewards less tangible than things. I think our generations need to better follow their example of sacrifice and frugality. They went without things in order to build new churches and to support other church work and missions.”

The model of giving to missions was a legacy that Krehbiel embraced while growing up on a farm near Hillsboro, Kan., and appreciates today in her ministry at Peace Connections in Newton. That organization

provides a conduit for peacemaking advocacy for many of WDC’s member congregations.

She exemplifies how her parents’ modeling of generous service is a legacy that continues to thrive in her own life.



Myrna Krehbiel in front of the Peace Connections store in Newton, KS

“It’s no accident

I am working at Peace Connections,” she said. “My Dad wanted to be a missionary but his life didn’t afford him the opportunity, and so he was fond of saying I was the missionary in the family.

“Even though my help was needed on the farm, every summer throughout high school and college I was allowed to go for a month to serve in other places such as Gulfport, Miss., Busby, Mont., and Atlanta, Ga.

“Their heart for service – along with their financial giving -- taught me that the most important thing in life is caring about others. When the focus is on others, there is no end to ways one can find to give.”

Western District Conference
Box 306, North Newton, KS 67117
Phone: 316-283-6300; FAX: 316-283-0620
Email: wdc@mennowdc.org; Website: www.mennowdc.org



WDC News

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Western District Conference grateful for gifts that keep on giving

Stories & sidebars by Laurie Oswald Robinson for Western District Conference

Marvin Penner hopes to leave his offspring what he considers the greatest legacy his parents left him – generosity without a price tag.

The first thing the late Alfred and Bertha Penner did after retiring from farming in Beatrice, Neb., was to pull up stakes, said Penner, their eldest son of Newton, Kan. The couple moved to Pennsylvania and Indiana to serve five years with Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Mission Board (now Mennonite Mission Network).

And before they passed away, the couple crafted a will for their estate. It included giving generously to their children and to charities of their choice, including Western District Conference (WDC) and other organizations.

“Even if they hadn’t left money to charities, we would have learned that life is to be lived generously — helping out wherever you could and to share whatever you had,” said Penner, a member of New Creation Fellowship in Newton.

“They modeled generosity in their lifestyle, along with giving 10 percent of their financial resources. It wasn’t the 10 percent that most shaped me. It was their attitude that 100 percent of life was given to them by God and should be given back. That’s what I hope my family is learning from me.”

Bequests gain added value in tough times

Penner is only one of many Mennonite offspring who have received this modeling of generosity. That generosity is bearing fruit in the lives of children as well as in the church organizations parents served for a lifetime – and remembered in their estate giving.

Leaders at WDC are grateful for these families who give charitably from their estate, especially in tough economic times when congregations are struggling locally. Any estate gift over \$5,000 is added to the Bequest Fund. And up to 10 percent of that fund can be added to WDC's budget income every year (**See Sidebar One**).

Up to another 10 percent can be added if contributions are not adequate to cover expenses for the year – such as was done in 2001.

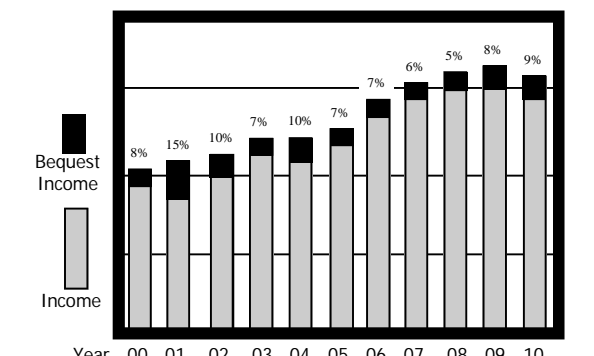
“In the past decade, there has been a decrease in income and giving from our member congregations,” said Clarence Rempel, conference minister. “The income from the estates is critical to maintaining the conference's vitality and all its ministries.”

Phyllis Regier, WDC treasurer, said that estate giving is especially valuable for how it benefits the conference in both its short- and long-term vitality.

“We are able to use a portion of this estate giving to help meet our annual budget, which falls between \$600,000 and \$650,000,” Regier said. “So these contributions help provide a base for the future as well as to stabilize the conference today.”

Sidebar One: By the numbers

The Western District Conference (WDC) Bequest Fund was created in the early 1980s. The chart below shows 11 years of bequest fund history with the amount of income from the Bequest Fund that was added to the budget.



Gifts of varying shapes and sizes impact generations

Dennis LeFevre, who helps to manage estate planning and giving through Mennonite Foundation (**See Sidebar Two**), a ministry of Everence, formerly MMA, said Anabaptists tend to deeply value both family and faith family and want to give fairly to both.

“We help parents know how to be fair to each child in the family as well as to all the organizations they desire to support,” said LeFevre, who works in Hesston, Kan. “To determine fairness, we use the theme of equitability rather than equality.”

“Equality tends to indicate that one gives equal shares to all, while equitability tends to indicate giving to each child or organization according to the level of need.”

Sidebar Two: Taking that first step

Lack of knowledge can often paralyze families from taking the first steps toward planning estate giving, said Dennis LeFevre, representative for Mennonite Foundation, an arm of Everence, in Hesston, Kan.

Part of LeFevre's job is educating families about the many ways they can give and to find a fit for them. Any family that plans to give long-term will contribute to millions given to charities each year. For example, in 2010 Mennonite Foundation allocated \$34.8 million to charities from the charitable trusts and charitable gift plans it manages.

Some ways families may give long-term include:

- Establishing a charitable bequest plan
- Donating IRAs to charity
- Giving farm commodities or real estate

**For more information or to set up an appointment,
call 1- 877-467-7294.**

But it is not dollars that matter most to many offspring whose parents do estate giving. Other children whose parents gifted WDC share Penner's convictions. They include Jerome Waltner, son of the late Waldo and Verna Walter, and Myrna Krehbiel, daughter of the late Walter and Edna Gaede.

“One thing their estate giving impressed upon me is that money is not the most important thing in life, said Waltner, who lives in Hampton, Va., and is a member of Huntington Mennonite Church in Newport News, Va. “Yes, money allows you to do things and to care for your family, but the sole value of it is not monetary gain.”