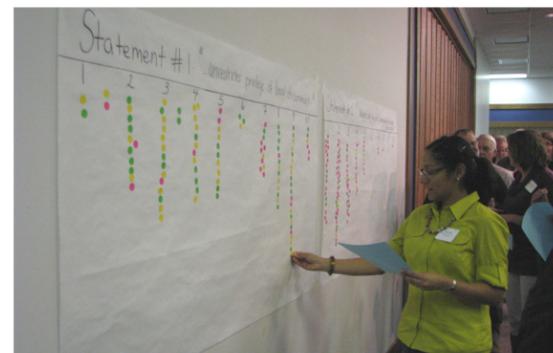


“We affirm that WDC is conducting a broad conversation that is not reactionary and is moving forward in a systematic way,” said Shue, Mennonite Church USA’s Director for Church Leadership Development and Cabinet Liaison to WDC. “Clarence Rempel [conference minister] has been very clear that he wants to be in consultation with the denomination throughout the entire process.”

Shelly, moderator-elect for Mennonite Church USA, agreed. “The MC USA Executive Board is very appreciative of the conference having postponed its decision-making on the Rainbow resolution until it has had time to study at the conference level and time to listen to delegates at the national conference this coming summer.”

**TWO:** There is deep respect for the Hispanic congregations’ declaration, sent to WDC, which says, “Our position about homosexuality has not changed. However, we will respect congregations that perceive homosexuality differently, and we want to be respected in turn.” For the full statement, go to: <http://mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/#Reference>.



**THREE:** The Reference Council sticky dot exercise revealed that participants favored a congregationalism of relational accountability. “The WDC delegate body may ask a congregation to practice consultation (to be defined by the leadership of WDC) when a congregation is making a decision that affects others.”

For a full report of the survey results and the proceedings of Reference Council, go to: <http://mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/#Reference>.

## Coming Events

**Dec. 12-13**  
Church Planter Retreat /  
Dreamers Advance  
Hesston, KS

**April 11, 2015**  
WDC Reference Council  
Location TBA

**June 12-13, 2015**  
Anabaptist Faith  
Formation—Growing  
in Christ Launch  
Bethel College  
North Newton KS

**Oct. 30-31, 2015**  
WDC Annual Assembly  
Bethel College  
North Newton KS

# WDC Garden

*Stories from Western District Conference*  
December 2014 / January 2015



## Church closes after 11 decades of family bonds and vibrant service

*by Laurie Oswald Robinson for Western District Conference*

When Aoife Rose Compton was born Nov. 18 to Rachele and Martin Compton, she was the last child to become part of Burrton (Kan.) Mennonite Church. After 108 years of ministry, the church will hold its final worship service Jan. 4.

The baby girl appeared at the end of a steady stream of funerals held at the church – 14 deaths in the last five years, with 10 of those occurring in the past two years. But Burrton Mennonite is no stranger to this cycle of life and death that has woven through its faith family for 11 decades. It’s a faith family that Rachele Compton, 42, said she cherishes for how it nurtured her as a child and her children today.

“Even though our kids are the only ones here and sometimes wish there were more children in the congregation, they loved having 15 sets of grandparents,” Compton said. “It’s been hard on them with so many people passing away, including Merle Schrag, who was just like an uncle to them.”

Schrag was one of Compton’s youth sponsors when she grew up in the youth group, Compton said. She is the youngest of seven children belonging to former pastor Jim Gundy and his wife, Marjorie.

They are still part of the 79-member church that about 25 people attend on Sundays.

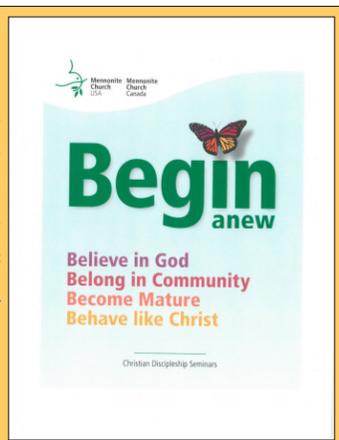
“He taught us how to water ski, and we had a picnic at the lake that was a big highlight of the year,” she said. “We also put on a big concert on Christmas Eve during which the church was always packed. By the time I was growing up, the youth group was tapering down, but some of my older brothers and sisters were part of a large youth group that had 12 baptisms in one year.”

More baptisms than funerals were standard for many decades at Burrton Mennonite with its peak worship attendance numbering up to 125 in the 1950s-60s, Jim Gundy said. He was pastor from 1973 to 2004, followed by Pastor Jim Dunn (see companion story), who is retiring Dec. 28. Seventeen pastors – beginning with the late H.P. Krehbiel -- served the congregation. WDC established it in the early 1900s for Mennonite families that had settled in the Burrton area in the late 1800s. The congregation first met in a house. Its first meetinghouse was built in 1910, and the present-day building was constructed in 1958.

In his 31 years of ministry, Gundy said the congregation was vibrantly involved in service projects for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), i.e. running the meat

## BEGIN ANEW

Christian faith is a combination of believing, belonging, becoming and behaving. These aspects of faith are explored in this 16-session discipleship course for small groups, Sunday school classes and newcomers who wish to be baptized. The WDC provided \$3,000 towards the translation of this project into Spanish through a Schowalter Foundation Grant. It is available at: <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/leadership-development/begin-aneu/>



 Western District Conference is a regional grouping of Mennonite Church USA congregations located in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

## Western District Conference

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counter each year at the local relief sale and creating hundreds of school and hygiene kits. The church was deeply committed to Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), including volunteering after a tornado in Hesston, Kan., and a prairie fire in Salina, Kan.

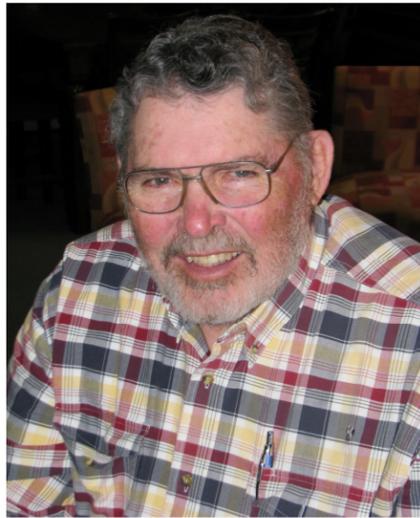
Lifetime member Ron Dick, congregational chair, whose grandparents were charter members, said it was a tearful day when they voted in favor of closing. “We had to face the fact that we were not showing the growth in numbers needed to keep alive the church’s original mission -- reaching out to the community and sharing the word of God.”



“There are usually about 10 or 12 of us who come to share a day together each month to create school kits and tie quilts,” said Marge Gundy, the church’s informal historian.

## Lifelong ministry bears fruit of redemption

by Laurie Oswald Robinson for Western District Conference



In fall of 1962 when Jim Dunn was a senior at Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., the local African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church invited him to be its pastor during the school year and the following summer.

So each Sunday for 12 months, Dunn preached to a racial ethnic congregation whose culture was far different from his own as a young adult Mennonite who grew up on a farm near Arlington, Kan. That adventure, however, set the tone for a lifelong ministry shaped by many experiences that broadened and deepened Dunn, who will retire from 52 years of pastoral ministry at the end of 2014.

He will preach his last sermon Dec. 28 as pastor of Burrton (Kan.) Mennonite Church. It will close its doors after 108 years of ministry after its final worship service and concluding celebration Jan. 4 (see companion story). Dunn, 73, is retiring due to his grappling with Parkinson’s Disease.

Dunn graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. He and his wife Ann, whom he married in August 1964, moved to Illinois to become pastor at Carlock Mennonite Church. He was pastor for 10 years at First Mennonite Church in Champaign-Urbana, Ill., followed by working for the former Commission on Education in the former General Conference Mennonite Church. He then served as Director of Church Relations and as Campus Pastor at Bethel College until becoming pastor in 1989 at First Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan.

He resigned First Mennonite in 1992 when his Western District Conference (WDC) ministerial credentials were revoked upon his confession of a

sex abuse relationship. For the next four years, Dunn underwent a process with WDC that involved counseling, payment to his victim and accountability – all of which led to a re-instatement of his credentials in 1996.

“It was a terrible and an extremely lonely and hard experience,” he said. “But I can almost say now that I am glad it happened because I am a better person because of it. I felt utterly exposed to everyone in the whole world. But after a while, when you really own your sin and failure, there is a tremendous liberating sense that you are holding nothing back, and that God’s forgiveness is so real.”

His redemptive suffering led him to extend redemption to others. For eight years, he taught Bible and preaching to inmates – some of whom were sex offenders -- in the

Ellsworth, Kan., prison. The program was sponsored by the former Pastoral Ministries program at Hesston (Kan.) College.

Also redemptive for Dunn were the congregations that welcomed him as pastor after his renewal. In 1996 he served as interim pastor at Faith Mennonite Church in Newton, and as pastor from 1997 to 2004 at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church in Goessel,

## Themes bubble up from WDC’s uncertainties on sexuality, governance

by Laurie Oswald Robinson for Western District Conference

MOUNDRIDGE, Kan. – When Western District Conference (WDC) leaders met Nov. 15 to discuss conference-wide survey results on how church governance should be practiced regarding same-sex unions, several themes bubbled up from a pool of uncertainties.



More than 140 people – including pastors and congregational leaders from 29 churches – participated in WDC’s fall Reference Council at Eden Mennonite Church. They explored survey results on sexuality, polity and unity completed by 1,700 constituents this past summer. And they reflected on new possibilities for forging more local autonomy within denominational accountability.

“... As our discernment moves forward the first question appears to be not whether WDC will maintain a basic polity of congregationalism, but rather what kind of congregationalism it will be,” said Jim Schrag, WDC’s Discernment Task Force chair and former executive director of Mennonite Church USA, during his Reference Council presentation. “What kind of covenants do WDC congregations need with each other? What can congregations decide on their own?”

Kan., before becoming part-time pastor at Burrton Mennonite.

“I am retiring from formal pastoring with inner peace,” he said. “I’ve had joy in my ministry and a sense of God’s unconditional love, despite my struggles.”

For the story of Dunn’s unique call to ministry, go to: <http://mennowdc.org/lifelong-ministry-bears-fruit-of-redemption/>.

“The second question may be more difficult – what kind of covenants does WDC have with other conferences in MC USA? What can each conference decide on their own and what may they decide only as one body of 21 conferences together, by means of the MC USA delegate body?”

The survey was piqued by a resolution submitted to the WDC delegates in July by Rainbow Mennonite Church that seeks “immunity” from the censure of pastors who perform same-sex unions in WDC congregations. Opportunity to respond to the resolution will happen at the next Reference Council, April 11, and at Annual Assembly, October 30-31, 2015. Despite uncertainty, however, three themes emerged out of presentations and table group discussions at Eden that are likely to give shape to future direction:

**ONE:** Mennonite Church USA denominational leaders affirm the nature of WDC’s process, said denominational leaders Terry Shue and Patty Shelly in interviews following their presentations.

