

It is a pleasure to be with you here today.

When Glenn asked me if I would consider speaking with you today about MCC and the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale, there were several things that passed quickly through my mind as we were talking: one of the first things that I remember flashing through my mind was the phrase “in the name of Christ”, the second thing that happened was the formulation that it is the human stories that make up the larger story of the Mennonite Central Committee and the third was how I first learned and began to understand what MCC is really about... that bit of knowledge came from hearing the experiences of my in laws, Orlo and Helen Goering .Their adult lives were shaped by their experiences serving with CPS and MCC, during the years of ww 2 and its aftermath. And perhaps the most important was a signature in a book explaining the impact of individuals on MCC. I got this book from my wife’s Aunt Fern Goering, ...inscribed in this book was the signature of Peter Dyck and the words in German “Gott Kann” ...God can....

And so, I begin this attempt to tell you...who probably know more about MCC than I do...about this organization of charity, compassion, development, education, love and hope that has promoted the work of Christ for 100 years.

I brought with me today this water pitcher. Some of you have seen this before. It is one of 40 that were created and sent to Relief Sales as a way to inspire fund raising and excitement during the Centennial year...the initial plan of the KMRS was to use the pitcher as a way to tell stories and then we would auction it off as part of the celebration.

For me I this pitcher, as it has since we received it about a year ago, is a symbol of hope, filled with the love, good will, organization and help... but it has also become a symbol to me of the message of Matthew 25....I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was hungry and you fed me, I was naked and you clothed me. People around the world thirst for hope, opportunity, health care, water, and food. And so, I decided that there are many more stories that need to be told, and this symbol of MCC’s helping and caring is more important now than ever. Covid 19, homelessness, hunger, oppression, natural disasters. MCC responds to these situations, here and around the world.

The beginnings of MCC are well documented and during this Centennial year have been made known to many people. Mennonite peoples left in the Ukraine at the end of the first world war were suffering from the effects of the war, and drought and the resulting famine. They reached out to their Brethren in North America. The Ukraine govt, indicated that it might be easier to work with one centralized committee rather than several differing Mennonite groups that wanted to bring aid and assistance to the peoples devastated by the situation. So, right here in Hillsboro and later in Indiana, a group of three men got together and organized a temporary committee, a Mennonite Central Committee, to feed, clothe, and help the Mennonite peoples of the Ukraine. ... as well as Catholics, Jews, and other peoples whose commonality was the suffering they experienced. Thousands were fed (25,000 a day), the food provided out of a

sense of Christian love...bolstered by the people in North America who used their creativity, generosity and commitment to finance this cause.

This temporary committee is still with us. Still reaching out, still providing empathy, relief and care. 100 years later it has grown in size, influence, and ways ministry is done.

So, I would like to tell you a couple of my favorite stories of MCC. I believe these stories help to explain why I see MCC as being a most significant organization of faith and deed.

Please use your imagination as I tell this story...

It is the 1940's and world war 2 was ravaging Europe and many were refugees and homeless and depended on the generosity of others. This was true of London, England during the time when the city was being bombed by the German Luftwaffe. Many had lost their homes and their basic possessions. John Coffman was an MCC worker in London during the days of this devastation and worked in a devastated area of residential London. MCC was providing funds, food, clothing and other supplies. John and his wife wanted to live out their Christian commitment in word and in deed. One very cold day a large family came in looking for winter clothing. They had lost everything and stayed at night in the bomb shelters. John was working with a young girl trying to find clothes and shoes for her. She was wearing slippers, worn out, stockings, hardly recognizable, a worn dress and nothing to help keep her warm. He struggled with what she would need and finally found things that she could wear. He believed that it was not just clothes they were giving but hope. John and his wife talked of letting the people know of the Christian love that was supplying the clothing was needed. Perhaps a label "in the name of Christ" could be added to the clothing as recognition of Christ's role ...the recommendation was taken to heart and the "needles and thread" that have marked the work of MCC from the very beginning sprang to life and in each piece of donated clothing went a tag "in the name of Christ"this phrase is now found on the cans of meat and broth MCC sends around the world. It is a phrase of unity and purpose and has allowed differing Mennonite groups to work together in over 50 countries...we work "in the name of Christ". Our love of others, inspired by the example of Jesus, was significant and it was a reason for the development of the Relief Sale Concept...we give what we can "in the name of Christ".

As I examined the many stories that are present on the MCC web site, present in books about the peace witness of various churches, and in the reports from the workers around the world; the faith, the growth, the challenge, the dedication, the empathy and the worry of MCC workers presented a picture to me....one of thinking beyond the present, to what God wants, one of risking their lives for others because that was what God required of them, and a picture of things working because people traveled and worked by faith.

One of the stories that sticks in my mind is a story of a young MCCer who struggled with his task.

Again, I ask you to use your imagination to help see the conversation...

A young man of ability and potential was part of the Mennonite Central Committee and had been given the task of feeding the refugees. He became depressed because the number of people who came often was more than they had prepared for and there were so many of them. They were weak, hungry, sick, and lacking in hope. This young man was frustrated because he could not help all the people who needed help...asking in effect...What is the use? His superior talked with him and asked him a question...did Jesus heal all the people that were sick? Did he feed all the people that were hungry? No, He did not...but He provided as there was need. We should do all that we can. Never let the fact that we cannot feed everyone be an excuse for not feeding and taking care of those we can.

...we must do what we can with what we have and provide as we can "in the name of Christ". Around the world we have MCCers working because there is a need. There is an opportunity to provide relief, to aid in development and to teach and model peace...Our Relief Sales are designed to raise money to be able to feed the hungry, help those who have lost their homes, and provide kits, and food, and education and assistance. Like the creation of MCC a hundred years ago, the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale brings together people as volunteers to prepare food, prepare things to sell, donate for those less fortunate. One of the things that truly satisfies me is the way that our volunteers become community and work together to bring aid and assistance to those around the world who they will never meet.

The last story I will tell you is a story that I experienced as I married into the Goering family of Moundridge. I learned to know the extended family, but I also learned of their experiences and the qualities that I admired in them. Mom and Dad spent time in France at the end of WW 2...they were part of the Reconstruction and Transportation Unit of France. The task of this unit was to move things and people and to rebuild churches, homes, communities. What I saw in them was an understanding about the world...a tolerance for others, a desire to make things better, a courage to take a stand for good, and a dedication to service that they passed on to others in the family. But what I also know and what I believe is true of others is that MCCers built relationships that lasted a long time...relationships with the people they worked with in their units, but also a relationship with the people they came to know as they carried out their service assignments. By participating in MCC they carried out the command to love one another as Christ has loved us. I am not sure that you can stay the same person if you set out to love others as God has loved you.

For me, who did not grow up in a Mennonite home or community, and who did not understand the significance of MCC until later, after marriage, after reading, after sitting at the table in Moundridge listening to the conversation as my in laws hosted the members of their unit some 30 years after the unit disbanded, listening to them talk about what they had done and what had happened to them. I have gravitated over the years to helping and serving in the ways that I can...and my association with the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale is one way I can serve.

It requires many people to give what they can to support the world-wide work of MCC. Relief Sales do that...we sell quilts and tractors, venenike and bohne berrogi, chairs and jewelry, ice cream and pie and we provide community. People come together to socialize, to remember, to see people they have not seen for a long time, and they come to volunteer by the thousands. The Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale, the only sale I know anything about, is an opportunity to witness...to share the good news of Christ as we use the talents God has given us to help others. We donate our time, our money... we invest in the work of MCC because there is a clear goal in mind...to make the world a better place.

The Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale is a place where there is generosity, kindness, commitment, hospitality, good will, and tolerance. It encourages people to use their talents to benefit others. It allows people to find joy by working with others who are so different from them. It is pooling resources. It is people who take a break from their job to assist in a humanitarian effort. It is "praising God when things go well", it is prayer and concern when things don't, it is forgiveness and it is thinking beyond ourselves. It is trying to provide resources to help make the world a little better in community by community. It is this way because at the core, our reason for having the sale is the belief that if there is a need a way will be found...as Peter Dick said long ago, when helping refugees to flee from Berlin and get to Paraguay .. when all the right things fell into place...Gott Kann.