

Addressing the emotional pain of war in Ukraine | Healing when trauma builds up | 'Can you help us help?'



A Common Place



A Common Place

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Encountering pain, finding hope

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



“Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”

(Psalm 55:6 NIV)

Be prepared to engage pain in reading this issue. I reviewed these articles in November just after visiting MCC staff and partners in South Sudan who daily assist thousands of people uprooted by violence and flooding. That—coupled with ongoing suffering in Palestine and Israel, here at home and in so many other places where MCC works—seemed too much to take in. Sitting outside at sunrise, I turned to Scripture.

The Bible is no stranger to unholy, horrible things, terrible stories of things humans can do to each other. The response is to lament, to voice the pain and anger and the desire for this to end. Nearly half the Psalms are laments. In Psalm 55:4-5, I read David’s words and cried along with him for escape and rest: “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.”

MCC’s partner staff experience pain as they help others. “There’s no way you cannot be affected,” shares Ephraim Kadala, a coordinator for an MCC project in Nigeria that helps care for caregivers. Many continue with the critical service of attending to others, and even survivors reach out to those around them. “God helped me to understand deeply that there is some kind of mission, even in these circumstances,” shares Margaryta, displaced by war in Ukraine.

These are stories we might rather not read. But the people who share them want someone to know, to care, to pray, to act. If you can, dwell with these stories. Then, perhaps, sit down to write a lament or read one of the many found in Scripture. Then stop to care for yourself as well. Perhaps you could respond by helping someone near you, making a school kit, working on a comforter or writing a letter to your congressional representative.

As Wanla Napo said after the loss of his children in Nigeria, “I learned to forge ahead, asking for his grace. Each morning, I pray that God will bring peace and security to our people.”

May we do the same.

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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Cambodia

Treasure in jars of clay

Staff from MCC partner Organization to Develop Our Villages (ODOV) are always seeking out new ways to foster peace and financial security in Cambodia’s Mesang District. In a training held by fellow MCC partner Peace Bridges Organization, ODOV employees like Sarin Manh, Sey Leangheng and Dul Sreybroem worked together to paint clay pots with images of harmonious communities. The pots were later smashed. Participants then put them back together, symbolizing the healing of communities fractured by conflict. The training helped ODOV staff develop techniques they can use

when holding sustainable agriculture workshops and community forums with local farmers, as well as in their day-to-day interactions.



Syria

Spreading winter warmth

Winters in Aleppo are dry but cold, and families are vulnerable to disease, especially as ongoing conflict leaves people with limited access to heating. MCC partner Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD) distributes coats, blankets and other relief items during the cold months. “The blanket is like a mercy for me and my family,” one recipient shared with FDCD staff.



Kenya

Serving and Learning Together

Through MCC’s young adult program Serving and Learning Together (SALT), Amelia Warkentin of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is spending a year as a teaching assistant at Victorious Learning Centre, a Mennonite school in Nairobi, Kenya. “I have learned to wear a positive attitude, be quick to laugh (especially at myself) and to put each day into the hands of God,” says Warkentin, left. “I encourage others to push themselves out of their comfort zone to be a part of SALT.” Learn more or apply now at mcc.org/salt.



Warm comforters, warm hearts

Fabric. Batting. Thread. At a surface level, these are the things that make a comforter, but the time and love our supporters put into each stitch also hold deep meaning for families in Ukraine, Syria and across the world.

Based on feedback from international partners, we recently updated our **comforter-making guidelines:**

- Made from new or nearly new material**
- 60x80 in or larger**
- Polyester or cotton batting (4-8 oz preferred for polyester batting)**
- Double knotted with crochet cotton (between 4-6 in apart)**

We are also happy to accept purchased comforters (twin or full size), as well as new, flat twin sheets.

For detailed specifications, fabric guidelines and drop-off locations, please visit mcc.org/kits/comforter. Or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).



Cover photo: Margaryta helps children in Ukraine heat through horseback riding. Her last name is not provided for security reasons. (Photo courtesy of AMBCU)

Addressing the emotional pain of war

Families in Ukraine are better equipped to deal with the trauma of war as MCC partners provide safe spaces and outlets for expressing their emotions.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCC PARTNERS

Editor's note: Only first names of Ukrainians are used for their security. Please note that content in this story may be disturbing to some readers.



Daryna sits with her children, Matviy and Zlata, at New Hope Center, where all three have benefited from group therapy. Read more about Matviy on p. 19.

A missile fell as Matviy, 10, and his younger sister, Zlata, 6, were walking near their apartment building in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, last August. Although it landed in another part of the city, they were frightened and ran home to meet their mother, who was already on her way to them.

After hugging her children, Daryna encouraged them to breathe in with their noses and release their breath slowly through their mouths. This was one calming skill that she learned at weekly group therapy at New Hope Center.

MCC supports New Hope in Zaporizhzhia and other partners who are addressing the emotional needs of children and adults traumatized by the Russian military's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These partners also provide food and water, hygiene supplies and shelter.

Daryna's children attend group therapy, too.



Riding therapy with Margaryta (in turtleneck sweater) helps children become more resilient to war-related stress and decrease related muscle stiffness.

Child psychologist Katerina leads them in play, art therapy and discussions about emotions.

"There is no child who is not involved in all of this fear," Katerina says. "So, it's unfortunate. I don't know if there are any fully healthy children anymore." She tells the children that there are no "bad" emotions—that fear and anger are normal responses—but that they can control how they respond to these feelings.

"What I feel is grief," Matviy says. When his family left their home in the village of Molochansk, where the Russian military was

taking control, his grandparents stayed behind. Matviy also left his friends and his school.

Online classes and weekly sessions at New Hope allow him to interact with children his age. And he has discovered the healing powers of fresh air and regular phone calls to his grandparents. "I need just to change the bad energy to a good one," he says.

Trauma that children experience from the war compounds any problems children had before the war, Katerina says. Whether the child was dealing with significant

“There is no child who is not involved in all of this fear.”



A group of children mold clay during art therapy offered through MCC partner Nevo.

mental health issues or common childhood anxieties, the emotional weight of the war tends to make the original problem worse.

The sessions provide a place where children can feel safe emotionally, Katerina says. “They feel accepted. Nobody will hurt them. Nobody will judge them. And in terms of the war, it helps them to be creating... maybe get distracted from their thoughts and get some positive emotions. It calms them down a little bit.”

Iryna, a psychologist at MCC partner Nevo, a charitable organization in Zaporizhzhia, says that if children receive psychological assistance early, they are less likely to experience deep psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. As children’s trauma is addressed, they are more likely to adapt and to keep learning.

The children see military personnel and equipment in the city, which is close to the contact line. They hear rockets and see buildings that were destroyed. Sometimes they need to move from one area of the city to another, and they get upset because they can’t



Ulya, who was separated from her cat during the war, holds a clay cat she made at Nevo.

sleep in their own houses, Iryna says.

But art therapy helps them to relax and distracts them from all the destruction, Iryna says. Working with clay is an effective medium for children to express what they feel and find hope.

One child, Ulya, 9, who had to leave her home because of the invasion, used the clay to make a cat. “We had to leave the cat at home. I miss him a lot, but we couldn’t take him with us,” she told her instructor.

By the end of class, students are eager to show their parents what they have made, Iryna says. “When they do something out of clay, they are joyful.”

Clay also can absorb anger that children carry. “The worst day of my life, when my

“... the muscles of a child are very tense. He or she is like stone.”

father went to war, I came home and saw that my mother was crying,” said Alina, 7, during art therapy. “When I found out that Dad was going to

fight, I screamed and cried a lot.”

Iryna allows the children to release their anger on the clay by beating it or throwing it. “When they have a piece of clay in their hands, they sort of get rid of their aggression through their hands, and it also returns some sort of control. ‘I can do something. The war destroyed everything, but I can create something.’”

Unexpressed anger, Iryna says, can literally make children sick or cause them to lash out at others. “Also, the muscles of a child are very tense. He or she is like stone.”

That’s one reason why the therapeutic horseback riding and massage project supported by Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine in the western part of the country is helpful for children who have been traumatized. Children can attend two weeks of therapy free of charge.



Margaryta uses massage to help Milana heal from war-related trauma.

Riding on a horse can help children's muscles relax and stretch, and their balance can improve, says Margaryta, who started and leads the project. She has degrees in physical rehabilitation and ergotherapy, which is similar to occupational therapy.

These benefits are important for children who have physical disabilities and for Milana, 4, who was so traumatized she did not want to walk. She and her mother had stayed in the basement of an apartment building for three weeks to avoid being killed by the shelling.

Rescuers eventually directed them to a bus where corpses lay on the floor and wounded people traveled with them. Milana and her mother reached family, but Milana did not talk or smile for three months. She didn't sleep well and was irritable and aggressive.

“Confidence, concentration and calm almost immediately sank into the heart of our child.”

As Milana participated in the therapeutic riding and massage program, she began to feel relief. She smiled after Margaryta finished massaging her legs.

“Her mother has to carry her less in her arms. She began to sleep better at night and show less aggression,” Margaryta says.

Milana even began to have thoughts about how to help other people.

Margaryta says it's rewarding to see children improve and their parents' emotional loads become a bit lighter.

Krystyna, the mother of Vanya, 6, says she could barely control her emotions when she saw her son's excitement as the horse began to trot. The bombings that shook the windows of their house, the loss of their pet parrot and the stresses of their life in a new town took a back seat.

Children like this become calmer and more communicative through riding therapy. His name is not provided for security reasons.



Krystyna, shown with her daughter, could barely control her emotions as she saw her son Vanya blossom as he rode a horse during therapy sessions for children who are displaced and affected by war.



“The smile does not leave the face,” Krystyna wrote in an evaluation. “Every day began to bring new discoveries and sensations. Confidence, concentration and calm almost immediately sank into the heart of our child. He wanted so much that these classes would not end.”

Margaryta gives parents exercises that they can continue with their children after the two weeks are over. She also encourages parents to look for nice places where they can go or activities they can do with their children to help them deal with their experiences.

It's not just children who need help processing what they've experienced.

Back in Zaporizhzhia, Daryna is grateful to New Hope not only for the group therapy that has benefited her

son and daughter, but also for the sessions she's attended.

For her, leaving her home in occupied territory and moving to a new city was extremely difficult. It took time to readjust. She credits New Hope with helping her become a better parent as she navigated a completely new life.

“Group therapy helped me to become less irritated,” she says. “In general, everything around you doesn't change, the situation is still the same, but I try to switch the focus of my attention on children and on my education.”

“If you always live in fear, it's not a life.” ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S.

“If you always live in fear, it's not a life.”

Give a gift - Where needed most

In a world where so many families are caught in conflict and crises, your gift provides urgently needed relief now and supports efforts to heal from trauma and rebuild lives and communities. Give in the enclosed envelope, online at mcc.org/donate or by contacting your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).

Margaryta*

Displaced by war in Ukraine, a horse lover uses her expertise to help traumatized children strengthen their bodies and spirit.

AS TOLD TO LINDA ESPENSHADE

*Full name not used for security reasons.

Before the Russian military invasion began, our Mennonite Brethren church in eastern Ukraine had special meetings to prepare us for evacuation. When the invasion happened, we had our luggage completely packed. There were 21 of us who would travel together.

We couldn't believe that the war started for real. Almost every day we were looking for where to go and stop and stay. There was a huge stream of people who were evacuating and needed a place to stay too.

Sometimes it was very sad for our team, and we just sat down and cried and cried. And other times we just laughed because emotions were too much.

We started to pray to God to show us one building in western Ukraine, one house where we could be together. One of our leaders got a call from his friend, who knew a friend in the United States who had friends in Zakarpattia, who had a house. They let us stay there.

When we came in February 2022, we realized it was not comfortable or fancy. It was hard to accept the reality that the toilet was outside, and there was no heat on the second floor. But anyway, we were all together for eight months. Then my mother, sister and I moved into our own place.

It took me half a year to recover a little bit. I think all those constant moves made me feel weak. In the church I started to attend there, I could not sing. My body and soul needed to refresh.

During this time, we started to deliver MCC-supported food packages to other displaced families through the

Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine. We started to talk to those families, and I could understand that my pain is not so big or so much as in some other people.

God helped me to understand deeply that there is some kind of mission, even in these circumstances. I have a bachelor's degree in physical rehabilitation and a master's degree in ergotherapy. I started to have a very huge desire to open some kind of ministry belonging to my profession and to help people refresh.

My leader told me, you need to think about it, and you need to pray about it. Then you will get a thought of how to make it.

I always liked horses. I sat on a horse for the first time when I was 12 years old. It was an ordinary walk at a leisurely pace on horseback, but at one point the rhythm of the steps increased, and the horse trotted several paces.

Those emotions of joy and flight cannot be described in words.

About that time, I had started to visit church and had given my life to Christ. I realized that a horse is not just an animal. Horses can help restore strength, restore emotions. Interaction with God's creation can help, can give a whole

lot of positive emotions.

Later, when I was in university, I was able to ride horses, but only a few times a month because it was very expensive.

In 2022, as I started to think deeply about what my ministry would be in western Ukraine, I knew that riding therapy, connected with massage, could bring big changes for the physical body.

So, I drove around looking for stables. At the first stable

“Interaction with God's creation can help, can give a whole lot of positive emotions.”



I found, I took more lessons and learned how to care for the horses. Special teachers showed me how to put the children on the horses and other details I needed to know to combine my skills in physical therapy with horseback riding.

In October 2022, I went to shelters where the supervisors gave me a list of children who needed rehabilitation, and I talked with their parents. I paid to give lessons using the stable's horses with money I made giving massages to people who had problems with their backs. Some of my friends who knew what I was doing donated money to help. MCC began to support the project in February 2023.

Many children in Zakarpattia hide in their hearts deep suffering, including pain, fear, loneliness and rejection. Each rehabilitation session aims to restore the child's emotional, physical and psychological health for positive personal formation as a young peacemaker.

When a child is in the saddle, it inspires and helps a child to concentrate no longer on one's own experience, but on new and potential achievements and opportunities. All the front and back movements of the horse send impulses to the brain and then to the whole body to refresh all the muscles.

During the massage, I need to understand which approach to use for that specific person. If a lesson is serious and difficult, massage relaxes the person after that and children are

quieter. If the person is relaxed a lot with the muscles on the horse ride, afterward when we do massages, we make the muscles more energized.

Conversation is open for the children. They can tell us what they are feeling. Very often, children talk about what they had to leave because of the war and relocation. They talk about a pet that died. Most children miss dad because men tend to live elsewhere to earn money or protect property. They talk about everything terrible that they saw.

Sometimes children don't want to get up from the massage table—they want to stay longer. Sometimes parents ask if I can give them a massage, too. I feel joy when I'm working with the children, especially when I can see some kind of results. And I like to make good emotional support for parents. Sometimes I offer prayer support.

In the future, I have a big dream about making my own rehabilitation center, where other types of rehabilitation could be used, and other kinds of clients could be served.

My traumatic experience created the starting point for this kind of service because I, myself, needed it. My experience helps me to understand people and serve them. ■

Margaryta, who has degrees in physical rehabilitation and ergotherapy, is currently based in western Ukraine.



Feature story

Healing when trauma builds up

The need for trauma-healing workshops increases as people in northeastern Nigeria are attacked and displaced again and again.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
WITH REPORTING FROM EYN
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCC STAFF AND PARTNERS

Editor's note: The names of the survivors in this story have been changed for their protection. Please note that content in this story may be disturbing to some readers.

In a photo taken in 2015, residents of Gurku, an interfaith intentional community in Nigeria's Nasarawa state, gather for a training on trauma healing. Since they started in 2015, HROC workshops have been offered to about 500 people each year.

After Boko Haram killed her husband, Elizabeth Yoha returned to the HROC workshop for a second time.

In 2020, Boko Haram fighters killed seven people in Elizabeth Yoha's village in northeastern Nigeria, including her neighbors. They looted and burned the family's food store, which helped to support Yoha, her husband and six children.

The next year, when members of the Islamist extremist group again invaded her village, everyone fled from their homes, but they survived.

The third time they came, in July 2022, the heavily armed men were shouting and shooting. The air filled with smoke from burning properties.

"My husband was running for his dear life, and they were pursuing him with a vehicle while he was trying to escape. They crushed him into the trunk of a tree (with the vehicle), and he died instantly," Yoha said in an interview with staff from Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN; the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

Yoha says she was in so much shock, she could not cry or even respond to the people who came to console her. "I suspected everyone in the village and was unwilling to talk to anyone and saw life as meaningless," Yoha says. "I was hopeless and even contemplated committing suicide."

She turned to a trauma-healing workshop offered by EYN, whose churches are predominantly in northeastern Nigeria. Since 2013, people in the region have experienced violence from Boko Haram as the group attempts to establish an Islamic state. Through EYN's partnership with MCC, the church has offered Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) workshops to about 500 impacted people each year since 2015.

Taking part in one of the three-day workshops had helped Yoha recover after the first two attacks. She hoped it would help her again.

Yoha and other survivors entered a safe space where, on the first day, they were assured that their emotional and physical pain was a normal response. The second day was for telling the stories of their traumatic experiences to other participants who could hear their pain and cry with them. They would

"I... was unwilling to talk to anyone and saw life as meaningless."



not judge them because they, too, had experienced terror. The last day focused on how to move on.

Facing the pain of traumatic events is not easy for participants or leaders. HROC workshop coordinators also report fatigue, illness and anger—signs of secondary trauma from listening to painful stories, some too horrific to recount for publication.

"There's no way you cannot be affected," says Ephraim Kadala, an EYN-HROC project coordinator. He recalled hearing the story of one man, Wanla Napo, who said Boko Haram abducted six of his children while they were trying to escape on Christmas Eve in 2021.

"And among the six children, one died on the way," Kadala recalls. "Then two died in captivity and the rest—there is no report as to whether they are still alive."



A workshop helped Wanla Napo find a way forward after the abduction of his six children. He and other villagers have since established a lookout plan, watching for signs that Boko Haram might attack.

It's easy to allow yourself to go so deeply into another person's pain that you become angrier than the person telling the story, Kadala says. Then you can no longer help because you also have become the victim.

In 2023, MCC offered a pilot training on secondary trauma that is expected to continue annually. At the training, Kadala learned more about techniques to help him listen, feel and validate the pain of the person sharing about a traumatic experience without getting personally overwhelmed by it.

HROC leaders must keep enough emotional distance so that they can leave the stories at the meeting instead of taking them home, says Mary Yohanna, a project officer. She realized at the training that she was carrying the story of a man who was shot through his ear and nose and suffers ongoing health issues. As a result, she was irritable and angry with her own husband and children.

One way to avoid carrying that trauma with her, she says, is to focus on caring for her health during trainings.

Leaders also must keep in mind that



A participant reads a list of emotional symptoms of trauma during a 2017 workshop in Mubi, Nigeria. (MCC photo/Matthew Lester)



MCC staff and workshop facilitators sit on a bench in Gurku, Nigeria, during a 2015 trauma workshop, the third that had been held in the community.

their goal is to help HROC participants find a way to move on and function in daily life, says Amos Zacharia, an HROC project officer. Getting lost in a person's pain doesn't help that person take the next step.

Increasingly, participants are returning to the workshop because the coping skills they learned the first time are overwhelmed by repeated traumas. Wanla Napo, the man whose six children were abducted, says that the second workshop "helped me greatly to recall the need to be resilient in the face of trauma," even though he felt devastated and hopeless after the loss of his children.

"It became a healing balm for me, and I felt relieved," he says. "I used to think so much about what happened,

but after the workshop I learned to forge ahead, asking for his grace. Each morning, I pray that God will bring peace and security to our people."

He and other villagers have established a lookout plan, where they take turns watching for early signs of an attack. He's considered moving from the area but has heard from others that relocating also brings suffering.

Yoha and her family did move away to escape the violence, but she says that the host community's initial welcome wore out over time. Ultimately, lack of land there forced them to move back home, where she could farm on her own land.

"...after the workshop I learned to forge ahead, asking for [God's] grace."

She is coping with her life now, she says, because her second experience with HROC reminded her of what she learned the first time—after a traumatic event, life continues.

"I am trusting God through prayers, and being with people helps a lot to strengthen me," Yoha says. "I also hope and pray that peace and safety will return to my community... that more and more workshops are conducted to reach the teeming people in our community who are still hurting." ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S.



Feature story

‘Can you help us help?’

MCC partners respond in first days of violence in Palestine and Israel.

STORY BY MCC STAFF
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCC PARTNERS

The first thing they said was, “Can you help us help?” recalls Sarah Funkhouser, who, together with her husband, Seth Malone, serve as MCC representatives for Jordan, Palestine and Israel. MCC staff were reaching out to MCC partners in Gaza to see if they were safe in the wake of days of bombing and strikes by the Israeli military following a series of coordinated attacks on Israelis by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023.

When staff reached MCC partner Al-Najd Developmental Forum, Funkhouser almost couldn’t believe that amid all that was happening around them, staff and volunteers were already focusing on how they could best aid their neighbors.

“It’s incredible,” Funkhouser says. Without a way for food or supplies to enter Gaza, “It’s really only possible to respond with trusted, existing partners. MCC being able to support Al-Najd in providing food baskets and bedding to families who have been displaced or have had their homes destroyed, there’s just no way to do it if we didn’t have partners like them already working there and being able to access local resources.”

By mid-November, despite the incredible danger around them, Al-Najd had distributed bedding to 250 families and emergency food to 550 families, providing urgently needed assistance to Ahmad Abu Nahel and others. “I prayed from my heart for help,” Nahel says. “You are the blessing God sends; my family had nothing to eat but we have now.”

A building used by the Near East Council of Churches, an MCC partner whose programs include vocational training.

MCC, which has worked in the region since 1949, laments the loss of lives, Israeli and Palestinian, and invites people to pray for all who are suffering and to act for peace and an end to the bloodshed.

As this issue goes to press in November, conflict continues. And now, as in past conflicts, partners in Gaza are responding to urgent needs as they can in the face of almost unimaginable losses and dangers, while other partners throughout the region continue their work as they are able in the face of uncertainty and unrest.

For the sake of those MCC partners in Palestine and Israel and the communities they are serving, Malone pleads for MCC supporters to remain hopeful, no matter how dire the news may be.

“Our partners need your hope,” he says. “We need your hope for us and for them. So giving is a sign of hope. Getting involved with MCC’s action alerts, that’s a sign of hope.”

And remember Palestinian Christians in your prayers, invites Pastor Ashraf Tannous, who leads Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala, just outside Bethlehem.

When asked what he hopes that Christians outside Palestine know, Tannous stresses remembering the kinship shared among all brothers and sisters in Christ.

“We are normal human beings. We are created in the image of God, in God’s own likeness, male and female.



Firas Hamlawi, right, a volunteer, and staff member Rifqah Hamlawi, center, of MCC partner Al-Najd Developmental Forum distribute food packages to families (recipient not named for security reasons).

Please don’t look at us as people who don’t deserve to live,” he says. “I want to remind everyone, and especially the Christian brothers and sisters all over the world, that we are all praying the Lord’s Prayer.”

The first words that we all say are “Our Father,” he notes. “This means that the moment we say ‘Our Father,’ there are relationships created. The first relationship is that we are God’s children...then we are brothers and sisters.”

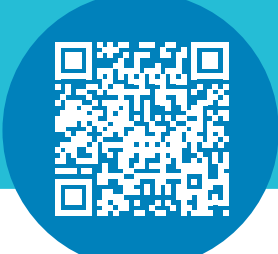
The cross that Palestinian Christians are carrying now is very heavy, he notes. “Do you know why? Because as Paul said, if...an organ of your body is in pain, the whole body is in pain. As Palestinians, brothers and sisters here, we are in pain.”

We at MCC invite you to join us in praying for peace, for our partners and all who suffer and mourn in both Palestine and Israel and to consider how you can donate or sign on to action alerts calling for an end to the violence. ■



Asked what message he has for Christians in Canada and the U.S., and what is he praying for, Pastor Ashraf Tannous answers in the words of an Arabic song that mean:

- Lord of peace, rain on us, peace.
- Lord of peace, give our hearts peace.
- Lord of peace, rain on us, peace.
- Lord of peace, give our country peace.



Hear more from Pastor Ashraf Tannous in this video.

What you can do

Go to mcc.org/Palestine-Israel to explore how you can:

- Pray for an end to violence
- Give to our response now
- Advocate for peace
- Learn more through stories, videos and a podcast

On assignment



Photo courtesy of Bethany Renata Loberg

"I am continually humbled by working with relatives of the disappeared."

Bethany Renata Loberg, left, stands with colleague Clavel Rojo before co-leading a workshop on peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Sonora, Mexico.

Serving in Mexico

Name: Bethany Renata Loberg

Hometown: Salem, Oregon (Salem Mennonite Church)

Assignment: Through MCC partner Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (SERAPAZ or Consulting Services for Peace), I work as a promoter for truth, justice and the issue of disappearances in the state of Veracruz. Disappeared people are those who have been taken and potentially killed by authorities or armed groups, their whereabouts unclear. Over 110,000 people are currently registered as disappeared in Mexico, 98% of them since 2006, when the government launched a war against organized crime. Relatives of the disappeared often form collectives with nearby families who are searching for their own loved ones. We accompany them, advocating for policies that address the disappearances.

Typical day: Some days involve meetings with colleagues and collectives. Other days, I co-facilitate spiritual reflection, care circles and workshops for collectives, including dignity-focused listening spaces for families whose loved ones' remains have been found. My team also walks alongside collectives as they march and take other creative actions to raise awareness. Each December, we co-organize a gathering of the national Movement of Our Disappeared in Mexico where the collectives share experiences and plan for the following year.

Joys: I enjoy weaving peacebuilding, yoga, trauma awareness, Bible stories and the conflict transformation frameworks I studied in college into workshops. I've seen participants come away more relaxed and connected to one another and to that which gives them strength and purpose. I am continu-

ally humbled by working with relatives of the disappeared, by the many ways they have created to resist, search, lift their voices, connect to strength, life and love, and accompany one another amid tremendous pain.

Challenges: Working with the relatives of the disappeared is simultaneously heart filling and heartbreaking, as they are driven by a potent combination of pain and love.

FIND YOUR PLACE

Go to mcc.org/serve or [linkedin.com/company/mccpeace](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mccpeace) or contact your nearest MCC office to find MCC service opportunities.



Read more about Loberg's work here.

for children

hello UKRAINE

How can you greet someone in Ukrainian?

Pryvit

(Say "pree veet")



My name is Matviy.*

Age: 10

Lives in: Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

I live in the city now with my mother, younger sister, my aunt and our dog. I used to live in a village in the countryside, but we moved because of the war in our country. My grandparents are still in the village. We talk to them on the phone every day. On weekends, I see my dad.

I am in the fourth grade and go to school at home on the computer from 8 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. I like art a lot. Someday, I would like to draw book covers. Once a week, I go to New Hope Center where I do art projects with other children, and we learn that it is important to help each other during the war. When I am not in school, I play games with my sister, like dinosaur bingo. My favorite dinosaurs are herbivores. I also like owls and wildcats. Sometimes I play outside on the playground. That is when I am most happy.

My favorite food: buckwheat cereal with sugar and milk

My favorite subject: math and art

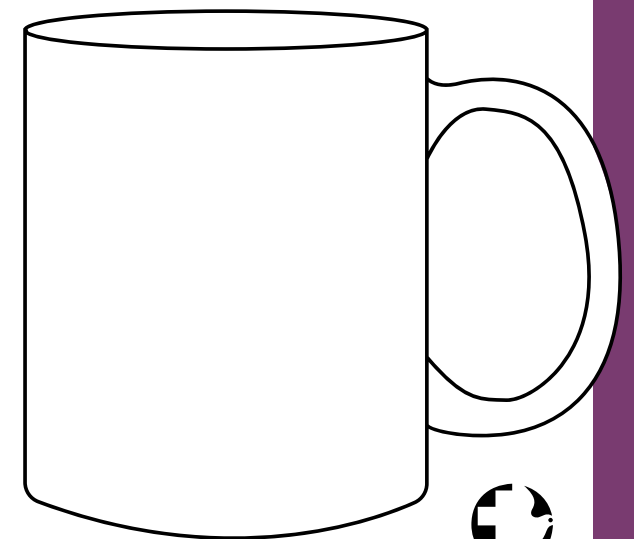
What I want to be: paleontologist or graphic designer

COLOR your emotions

At New Hope Center, children learn to recognize their feelings by coloring a cup like the one shown here. Color the cup based on how often you felt each emotion today.

So, if you felt a lot of happiness, and a little sadness and fear, color your cup mostly pink with some blue and purple. Talk about the colors of your cup with someone you trust.

- angry, annoyed
- calm
- anxious, scared
- surprised
- joyful
- happy
- inspired
- sad



*Last name not used for security reasons.





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Share unbridled joy.

Donita Wiebe-Neufeld has had a way with horses from an early age. In 2022, Ace, a charming colt with a knack for making people smile, trotted into the Edmonton, Alberta, resident's life. In addition to her role as church engagement coordinator for MCC Alberta, Wiebe-Neufeld volunteered her own time to raise nearly \$5,000 for MCC through "Faces with Ace." Family and friends donated to take photos with Ace and got giddy by giddy-upping with her beloved horse.

mcc.org/get-involved

In this new year, how could you use your talents to help others gallop into greener pastures?

