

# Boosting income and voices in Nepal | Young adults sparking change | Welcoming migrants in Mexico



## A Common Place





# A Common Place

Volume 31 Number 1 Winter 2025

## Do not despise small beginnings

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER  
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.*

(Zechariah 4:10, NLT)

Zechariah was given a vision of encouragement that the small steps Zerubbabel had taken to rebuild the temple after exile would result in a beautiful place of worship.

Through the decades that MCC has existed as a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches sharing God's love and compassion for all, our approach has been through small beginnings.

Our partners are people around the world who have responded to nudges to serve their neighbors and then, with tenacity, have inched forward. God blesses small beginnings and turns them into bigger works. Even the smallest effort is an act of faith that God can empower through his Spirit working in us.

In this issue, you will be encouraged by how Victor Lampón Leon, Consuelo Martinez and others responded to a nudge to care for migrants. From this small beginning significant ministries developed. In Nepal, Rajendra Sah kept following a dream to learn more to decrease the injustices he saw his father experience. After years of small steps, Sah is now teaching many farmers what he has learned. By beginning small, Sangita Soren can now work her own land rather than working in others' fields and can better care for her family.

We see this throughout MCC's history. The nudge of four women in Manitoba to sell used clothing to benefit MCC resulted in thrift shops all over Canada and the U.S. and millions of dollars. John Hostetter's effort to encourage children to collect spare change is now My Coins Count, raising over \$600,000 a year. MCC itself is supported by people responding to nudges—to send a small check, to pray for MCC workers around the world, to send a letter in support of migrants' rights, or to create comforters or school kits and more.

Let us be aware of and respond to nudges to do small things. The Lord rejoices to see the work begin!

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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](http://mcc.org)

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Find more news at [mcc.org](http://mcc.org)



## IVEP

### IVEP turns 75

In 1950, MCC welcomed its first cohort of young leaders and peacemakers into the Trainee Program, now known as the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP). Since then, nearly 4,000 young adults from around the world have ventured to the U.S. or Canada to spend a year sharing their talents, honing new skills and building relationships. From November 6-9, 2025, IVEP will celebrate 75 years of cross-cultural collaboration for relief, development and peace through online and in-person events. IVEP alumni, and

those who have worked with or hosted participants through the years, are invited to learn more at [mcc.org/ivep-75](http://mcc.org/ivep-75).



## Ethiopia

### Making a splash

For students in Batu, Ethiopia, hygiene and education go hand in hand. MCC partner Beza Community Development Association is helping to build and maintain wells, latrines and handwashing stations at local schools, including Ajiti Primary School, where Debora Abreham and Mekdes Bekele study.



## Cuba

### Hearty helpings of hope

Each year, MCC sends hundreds of thousands of pounds of canned meat around the world. This meat provides more than just nourishing protein to community members. "When we arrive with this help, many of them burst into tears because they feel God hasn't forgotten them," says Bishop Luis Hernandez of the Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church in Cuba, an MCC partner. BIC pastors and church leaders distributed meat in 2023 (pictured above) and after two hurricanes and an earthquake in fall 2024. Read more at [mcc.org/canned-meat-cuba](http://mcc.org/canned-meat-cuba).

## Share warmth this winter

What do MCC comforters mean for families around the world? It's hard to sum up in one blanket statement. A comforter is a source of winter warmth, a piece of cheerful décor for people facing hardship, a tangible reminder to families that their needs haven't been forgotten. This winter and year-round, MCC seeks lovingly sewn comforters that we can share across the globe.

We welcome contributions of warm, soft comforters following these guidelines:

- Made from new or nearly new material
- 60 x 80 in or larger
- Polyester or cotton batting (4-8 oz preferred for polyester batting)
- Double knotted with crochet cotton (between 4-6 in apart)

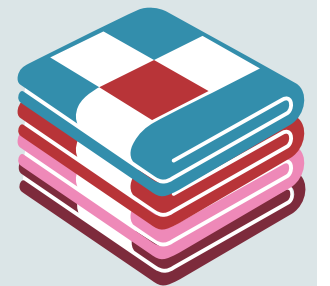
MCC also accepts purchased comforters (twin or full size), as well as new, flat twin sheets.

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

## The Great Winter Warm-up

Explore ways to collaborate with other comforter makers.

[mcc.org/great-winter-warm-up](http://mcc.org/great-winter-warm-up)







Sangita Soren stands at the edge of the fishpond on her farmland in Jahada Rural Municipality, Morang District, Nepal.

Cover story

## Boosting income and voices

In Nepal's rural lowlands, an MCC-supported project helps marginalized communities break down social barriers and build up their financial security.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK  
PHOTOS BY MCC/FAIRPICTURE/UMA BISTA

**O**n an April morning, the sun pierces through a gray-blue haze in Nepal's lowlands, near the India border. Well before midday, the temperature is fast approaching 100 degrees amid an ongoing heat-wave.

Sitting in a shaded spot on her farm in Jahada Rural Municipality, Sangita Soren recalls how, when she was a daily wage laborer, there was no escaping this heat.

Working in the fields of local landowners, she could not decide when to take breaks. She would need to report to work early enough that she had to leave her two daughters at home for a few hours before their school day started.

A lack of access to land, formal education and government resources have left marginalized communities with few options beyond daily wage labor—mostly farming or, for some men, construction work in the nearby city of Biratnagar. These are just some of the barriers that groups once labeled lower caste face as they work toward success and belonging, even though Nepal's caste system is now illegal. And while some women work in local fields, cultural norms keep others at home, even if their husbands' incomes can't meet the family's needs.

Today, though, MCC partner Sahayogi Hatharuko Samuha (Group of Helping Hands, SAHAS) Nepal is helping families in this community to farm, fry and fish their way over these hurdles.

After receiving training from SAHAS, Soren received

**“Now, I can work nearby in my farm... I can come for rest and to take care of children...”**

help from her in-laws in leasing land, once covered in bamboo, right by her home. Today it's home to a variety of thriving crops, including tomatoes, okra, beans and cauliflower. Soren makes compost from farm waste to nourish the soil. Biopesticides that Soren makes on-site with a combination of bitter plants, animal urine and ash protect her crops without harsh chemicals.

What was once a mud pit, full of weeds, is now a fishpond in the middle of her plot. The fish she raises and sells are fed with waste from a pig she is raising in a pen near the compost bin. To the side of the pond is a hutch where, on this spring day, a mother duck sits atop newly laid eggs. When it's time to take

a dip in the pond, the ducks' swimming strokes will help oxygenate the water.



This flourishing farmyard has helped Soren earn more income. She and her family also benefit from her

**Instead of working as a day laborer, Sangita Soren now tends her own thriving farmland.**





**Shree Ram Mahato (left) walks through a field with Ranjit Mahato Nuniya, a member of his farmers' group.**

newly flexible schedule. “Now, I can work nearby in my farm, and I can calculate my time,” she says. “And if it is too hot, I can come for rest and to take care of children so I can manage better.”

With guidance from SAHAS, residents form groups and learn skills like vegetable growing. SAHAS helps these groups register with the rural municipality, which lets them build a rapport with their local governments. The groups also save money collectively, so that they can buy communal farming supplies or loan money to members in emergencies. In some communities, including Soren's, these groups consist solely of women.

Other farmers' groups, like the one Shree Ram Mahato joined, are co-ed. Mahato's family has farmed in Jahada for generations, and he began accompanying them in the



**Shree Ram Mahato displays rice he grew using yield-boosting techniques learned through SAHAS.**

fields at a young age.

But since his youth, weather patterns in the region have changed. The techniques he learned as a child are now less effective. “We were practicing a very traditional way of farming rice paddies, but nowadays it doesn't rain on time,” he says.

SAHAS has taught Mahato's farmers' group how to minimize the shocks of climate change. They learned that properly spacing rice plants can help increase yields, even when growing conditions are less than ideal. SAHAS also taught them how to select varieties of grains and vegetables that are more resistant to flooding and drought.

And group members learned of the benefits of crop diversification. Throughout the year, Mahato grows a variety of plants, including wheat, okra and greens. He says that if his family loses one crop, “We try to recover from the other crops. And we do good in it.”

**“All people come and it feels like we have a stronger relationship now.”**

SAHAS helps groups diversify not just their fields, but their income overall, through activities like raising livestock and opening businesses.

Take Suman Devi Paswan, who is sizzling her way to success with a snack stand, where she makes dishes like aloo chop (spiced potato fritters) on-site.

She learned to cook while helping her family prepare food for gatherings, but SAHAS helped her see the business potential that her lovingly made snacks held and gave her a low-interest loan to get started. Paswan enjoys staying busy with the shop, which has allowed her to connect with customers from a variety of backgrounds. “All people come,” she says, “and it feels like we have a stronger relationship now.”

Interactions like this can be critical to empowering marginalized communities, stresses SAHAS agricultural technician Rajendra Sah.



**Suman Devi Paswan sells aloo chop and other freshly fried snacks at the shop that she opened with help from SAHAS.**



Sah says that in the past, higher-caste people would refuse food prepared by people from marginalized castes, even after the caste system was outlawed. Now, he says, people who would have been from higher castes come and eat, helping to break down the barriers that remain.

Shova Beshra, a mother of three who used to rely on daily wage labor, now puts her sewing skills to work in a tailor shop she opened on a well-traveled road.

She got the idea through a SAHAS training on entrepreneurship. “I had that skill, but I had never thought of using that,” she says. “It definitely has increased my income.”

And Beshra’s group has found a new income stream that’s fed by a pond.

After learning about fish farming in a SAHAS training, members chose to wade

into the aquaculture world together. SAHAS staff helped them secure a lease for a pond on nearby government land and advised them on everything from selecting fish fingerlings that would thrive at different depths of the pond to techniques to keep the pond clean and repel pests.

The women meet regularly to maintain the pond and feed the fish. “We take this fishpond as our community property,” says the group’s chairwoman, Kalpana Kumari Marandi. “If anything needs to happen, we do it together.”

A few of the women, including Marandi, sell each catch at the market. The money they earn will go into the group savings. “It has been really very good because the money our husbands earn is not enough. So, this has really supported the family to meet other expenses,” she says.

**“In the rural municipality, we are known as entrepreneurs...”**



Video: Join Kalpana Kumari Marandi at the pond and market.

Women’s group members and male relatives catch fish at the women’s communal fishpond.



Shova Beshra sits behind the sewing machine in her tailoring shop. The business has allowed her to earn more income for her children, including Priyanka Murmu (meet Priyanka on p. 19).

Participating in the fishpond has boosted not only members’ incomes, but also their confidence, Marandi says. “Women in our community, in the Santhal community...they feel shy all the time...I’ve seen women who can’t even speak for themselves.”

But the women in her group trust in their talents and have learned to advocate for their needs, whether with their husbands or government officials. And the rest of the community has taken notice, she says. “In the rural municipality, we are known as entrepreneurs, fishing women.”

Marandi says that she and the other members hope that

more women in the community will be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

For Beshra, achieving that dream means sharing what she learns with her family, including her two daughters. “My hope is to educate my children...so that they become good individuals...and they can reach higher up. They can achieve their dreams.” ■

*Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Uma Bista, a freelance photographer in Nepal, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.*

### Give a gift – Support immediate needs and long-term dreams

MCC helps people in Nepal and worldwide develop the skills needed to lead their families and communities into hopeful futures. Your generosity gives life to these livelihoods projects and helps MCC address urgent needs and promote peace. Donate in the enclosed envelope, give online at [mcc.org/donate](http://mcc.org/donate) or call MCC U.S. toll free 888.563.4676.





First person

## Rajendra Sah

An agricultural technician in Nepal reflects on how a life-changing scholarship has helped his family and community succeed.

AS TOLD TO SIENNA MALIK

**W**hen I was growing up here, in Jahada Rural Municipality, in Nepal's lowlands, my father was a daily wage laborer, farming in other people's fields. Much of what he earned, he invested in my school supplies and books.

By the time I was a teenager, I'd go along with him on Saturdays, when I wasn't in school.

I used to see the landlords shouting at him if something went wrong. I knew there had to be a better way to guide farmers than scolding them.

I wanted to study to become an agricultural technician and teach other people, without treating them the way those landlords treated my father. But the course I needed to take, it was 25,000 Nepali rupees (190 USD). That was a lot of money for us. Because of my family's financial situation, I could not go. Instead, I finished secondary school and began doing daily wage work for a living.

I held onto the dream of going for agricultural technician studies. I wanted to save up the money. But my younger brother, he was in class eight. I didn't like the way he was being taught. I wanted to send him to a better school in the nearby city of Biratnagar. Because of that, and a loan I took out when my younger sister got married, I couldn't save the money.

And then, in 2017, a staff member from an MCC partner came around my village to speak with the young adults. He let us know of a vocational training program offered through Sailaja Acharya Memorial Polytechnic Institute, right here in Jahada.

The opportunity came with a generous scholarship. I sat for the entrance exam and knew many of the answers because of practical experience I had working in fields. That is how I was selected. The project paid 23,000 Nepali rupees of the tuition. All I had to add was 2,000 from my side.

The program took 15 months. The first year was a mix of theoretical lessons in a classroom and hands-on training. During this time, my mother was taken seriously ill. I got married, and my wife was able to take care of my mother as she got better. But I still missed many classes to tend to her. My work experience helped me fill in the gaps, however, so I was able to pass my exams.

During the final three months, we were sent for on-the-job training. I worked as a technician with the agricultural resource center in Biratnagar.

At the same time, I leased some land to start a farm of my own. I shared what I'd learned in school with my parents, brother and wife, so that we could all grow vegetables together. When I could afford to do so, I expanded the land so that we could grow rice and wheat, too. I started investing my earnings in cows. As the farm grew, we all began to

earn more income. I started making 1 million Nepali rupees (7,500 USD) per year from the farm.

While still working on my farm, I took an 18-month position with the agricultural resource center. In 2022, after that contract ended, I found my current role with Sahayogi Hatharuko Samuha (Group of Helping Hands, SAHAS) Nepal. I was excited that SAHAS worked in Jahada, in my own community. And when I learned that SAHAS partners with MCC, one of the organizations that made my education possible, my happiness knew no bounds.

My family has been expanding. My wife and I had a son. My brother finished secondary school and married. With the money I've earned through farming and work, I feel secure in my ability to save for my son's education.

At the same time, I have helped my brother pursue studies in information technology. And while married women in my community are expected to stay at home and care for their families, it has been my sister-in-law's dream to enter the health care field. I helped her secure a scholarship and can help with any costs that this funding does not cover.

And through my role with SAHAS, I can help others in my community

receive the training they need.

I work with farmers' groups that we've helped residents establish throughout Jahada. I teach them about things like choosing the right seeds for this region and caring for fishponds.

I strive to walk alongside the farmers, rather than just supervising them. If they cannot meet during my working hours, I'll check in on them in the morning or in the evening, on my own time. When they are hesitant to adopt new practices, I calmly explain why different techniques are beneficial. And I am sure to listen to, and learn from, them as well.

Many of the farmers here come from marginalized groups. They did not have much access to the government before—many did not know where the rural municipality office was. But our trainings teach farmers about their rights, and about how to advocate for themselves with the government. Now, I've seen group members reach out to not only our local officials, but even the provincial parliament. We've been able to break down barriers, and help people overcome caste discrimination.

In 2022, SAHAS began administering the vocational training program with MCC. I feel very happy that SAHAS is running this training program and giving other young adults a chance at achieving their dreams. If I had not had this opportunity, I would not be where I am, working in the community, helping other people and sharing my knowledge with everyone. ■

*Rajendra Sah, pictured visiting a local farmer, is an agricultural technician with Sahayogi Hatharuko Samuha (Group of Helping Hands, SAHAS) Nepal.*



Feature story

# Sparking change in rural Nepal

## In Nepal's Morang District, young adults are learning how to advocate for community members' safety.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK  
PHOTOS BY MCC/FAIRPICTURE/UMA BISTA

The sun beats brutally onto the courtyard of Shree Sabitri Secondary School, in Kerabari Rural Municipality, Morang District, Nepal. But thanks to fast-spinning ceiling fans, cool air twirls through the school's classrooms, making learning a breeze for Shree Sabitri's students, who are between 3 and 18. Previously, faulty wiring had left many of the fans in disrepair. Moreover, the underlying electrical issues presented a grave fire risk. School leadership first learned of the electrical hazards through a meeting with participants in the Youth Empowerment and Eco-Entrepreneurship Project (YEEP), an MCC-supported project that equips young adults in Kerabari with the skills they need to find economic sta-

bility and lead their communities. In addition to spotting new ways to expand their own incomes and opportunities, participants learn how to identify challenges in their communities, raise awareness about them and find solutions together. Mamata Parajuli is a business student at a university in Morang District. She learned about YEEP when staff from MCC partner Hilly Rural Development Organization of Northern Morang (HRDON) visited her community in Kerabari to promote the project, which they started in late 2022. Parajuli has had an interest in serving her community since childhood, so the advocacy side of the project immediately spoke to her. At a two-day training, she and other participants developed skills like conflict mediation and social mapping, which entails traveling around one's community and collecting data about properties and families. "After getting back from the train-

ing, we felt that we were the responsible ones for our society," Parajuli says. She soon formed a small advocacy group with other participants, including Ganesh Magar. Local socioeconomic challenges have led many young men from Kerabari to find work elsewhere. Magar worked as an electrician in Qatar for four years and gained an additional two years of experience in Kathmandu. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, his work prospects dried up, so he moved back home to Kerabari. Through YEEP, he has begun growing mushrooms to earn income, while using the knowledge he gained as an electrician to look out for his neighbors. When Magar and Parajuli's group began mapping their community, they discovered that at least five homes had burned down in electrical fires in the past year. Magar saw that many buildings in the area featured exposed wires, overloaded circuits, misplaced meter boxes and other hazards. To save money, families often wire or re-wire their homes themselves, not realizing the safety risks that improper configurations bring, says Tek Bahadur Limbu, who chairs the board of the Yangshila Rural Electricity Cooperative. Magar, Parajuli and their group-mates decided to raise awareness about electrical safety. Parajuli, who is considering a career in mass communications, says they reached out to neighbors through community events and social media posts, often planned in conjunction with the electricity



Video: Cows, strawberries and new opportunity for young adults.



Buddha Kumar Limbu (left), a teacher at Shree Sabitri Secondary School, and YEEP participant Ganesh Magar stand at the front of a recently rewired classroom.

cooperative. Residents come away from these events feeling more comfortable approaching the electricity cooperative with questions. The cooperative's staff and board members have become more proactive in communicating electrical risks to households. Tek Bahadur Limbu has appreciated the chance to collaborate with YEEP participants. "I feel really very happy that they are working to draw attention...they bring fresh ideas." Group members have also conducted outreach with government-run institutions like Shree Sabitri Secondary School. A teacher, Buddha Kumar Limbu, recalls that when Magar and Parajuli's group visited the school, a fire had recently occurred at his neighbor's home. Talking to the YEEP participants, he realized, "Rather than wait for that incident to happen, it is good to be proactive." He soon got his own home rewired and is hopeful that YEEP will inspire more community members to follow suit. Parajuli has long been interested in

**Our elders have done a lot for us and it's our turn."**

a variety of causes, including education and wildlife conservation. But community members weren't always so receptive to her ideas. "After being part of this project, they take me seriously and they recognize me, and they try to connect me with other people," she says. She now feels confident advocating for herself and her community and feels a responsibility to do so. "Our elders have done a lot for us and it's our turn." YEEP has given Magar a chance to reengage with his community after his time away, and he hopes that YEEP, which also offers training for farmers, will inspire more young people to stay home and make a local impact. Moving forward, Magar and Parajuli plan to continue raising awareness, seeking to reach as wide an audience as possible. "A collective impact has the force to create a change," says Parajuli. ■

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Uma Bista, a freelance photographer in Nepal, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.

Mamata Parajuli stands in the courtyard of Shree Sabitri Secondary School, which was rewired after a meeting between school officials, Parajuli and other YEEP participants.





# For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat

## Devoted workers and volunteers at MCC-supported church shelters in Mexico welcome migrants.

STORY BY JASON DUECK  
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MAST



Victor Lampón Leon and Rocio Valencia Islas make arepas with migrants at La Mano de Dios en Apoyo al Migrante (Hand of God in Support of Migrants). Below, Lampón leads a worship service. In the photo on p. 14, the couple shares a moment of laughter in the midst of their work.



**W**hen people ask how his work supporting migrants began, Pastor Victor Lampón Leon says he knows the story sounds a bit fantastical. Fifteen years ago, Lampón was coming home from work in Mexico City, when a train passed nearby. He noticed a large group of people, riding not from the safety of a passenger car, but dangerously perched on top of the moving train—a common sight across Mexico.

“Right then, God spoke to me and told me that I was going to work with migrants,” says Lampón. But at that time, he didn’t know what really helping them looked like.

He found out that the train he’d seen made a stop in the nearby municipality of Tultitlán. So, he, his wife Rocio Valencia Islas and some members of their church collected food, water and clothes and brought them to hand out to migrants near the train station. One of the first groups they met had come from El Salvador and included an older man who kept asking them for shoes.

“We gave him food, we gave him water, we gave him the shoes that he wanted,” says Lampón.

“And the man said to us, ‘You saw me naked, and you gave me something to wear. You saw me hungry, and you gave me something to eat. You saw me thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. This is what the Bible says.’”

Since that day, Lampón has never doubted his calling.

**“Right then, God spoke to me and told me that I was going to work with migrants.”**

Today, he and his wife lead a church that revolves around providing respite, attention and care to migrants passing through Ecatepec, a town just outside of Mexico City. MCC has provided support to the ministry, La Mano de Dios en Apoyo al Migrante or Hand of God in Support of Migrants, for the past three years.

The space they have is small—five bunk beds and a single bed completely fill one room, while the one car garage-sized remainder hosts church services, meals, additional guests and whatever else the ministry requires. Lampón says the most they’ve ever hosted for night was 48, but 35 to 40 is typical. Women and children double up on the beds when needed, turning 11 spots into 22, and the church puts down sleeping mats anywhere else someone could lay their head for the night.







**Pastor Roman Dominguez stands at Oasis del Migrante (Migrant Oasis). At right, he and Consuelo Martinez make doughnuts for migrants to sell in Juárez, Mexico.**

One woman, 48, whose name is not provided for security reasons, has slept in one of those beds every night for the last seven months. The process of applying for asylum in the U.S. can take months or even years, so long stays at the shelter are common. She is migrating from Cuba to join her husband who successfully migrated to Iowa two years ago. She heard about this church from a woman she met earlier in her journey and says she could never have imagined how well she's been treated during her stay here.

"They've really helped me in everything. They treat me as their family," she says. "I don't have anyone. I am literally alone on this journey. I don't have any help. They've helped me. I've gotten sick and the pastor has offered help at any hour, saying, 'You can stay here until you get your [asylum] appointment. Don't worry, you have food, you have shelter, you have clothing.'"

Because migrants are both mobile and vulnerable, it's hard for agencies to effectively esti-

mate their total numbers.

Most official guesses put the migrant population in Mexico at around 1.5 million, but it's almost certainly much higher.

And it's not only migrants from other parts of Latin America making the difficult journey. Migrants from all over the world—Ukraine, Haiti, Sudan, Afghanistan and countless other countries—visit these shelters on their journey to the southern U.S. border.

Just a decade ago, there were few, if any, churches in Mexico operating shelters. But since 2018, Lampón says, many churches have seen how overwhelmed the government shelters had become and could not ignore Jesus' clear call to care for the stranger. Now, church-supported shelters make up a significant percentage of the sector.

And for those like Lampón on the outskirts of Mexico City or Consuelo Martinez, who works in Juárez, this isn't just about meeting essential needs. Shelter, food and water are vital, but their ministry is to care for those stay-

**"... One way we can be a blessing is by offering them work ..."**

ing with them in as many aspects as possible.

Just a few miles from the U.S.-Mexico border crossing into El Paso, Texas, in a small, converted warehouse, Martinez starts each day at 3 a.m. She and two other members of the team at Oasis del Migrante (Migrant Oasis) have filled the small storage area between the office and kitchen with all the equipment they need to prep, fry and decorate more than 300 doughnuts a day, topping them with icing in flavors like chocolate, maple glaze and hazelnut.

By 5 a.m., the doughnuts are ready, and migrants from Oasis pick them up and take them to sell on street corners across the city.

Many sell on corners where regulars come by every morning, craving the sweet treats that aren't common elsewhere in Juárez. Most will sell their lot within an hour, earning profits they can keep to sustain themselves or their families.

"We see it as entrepreneurship for the migrants," says Martinez. "Some of them have jobs, but one way we can be a blessing is by offering them work, ways to make themselves some money."

Martinez is very familiar with how hard it can be to find work as a migrant. Born in Honduras, she lived in the U.S. some 20 years ago but was doing so without documentation. She and her husband had three children in the U.S. before they divorced. Martinez decided to go back to her family in Honduras with the children.

Two years ago, with her children aged 17, 16 and 11, she began the process of returning to the U.S. That path

**"But something changed when I started serving here. I felt within myself peace, like I feel good here, maybe this is okay."**

ultimately led her to Juárez, waiting on her appointment at the border without knowing when it might come. A friend introduced her to Pastor Roman Dominguez, who oversees Oasis, and she was welcomed into the shelter.

"But something changed when I started serving here," says Martinez. "I felt within myself peace, like I feel good here, maybe this is okay."

"The pastor, everyone, said I would feel different when I got my visa appointment, but I didn't think I would. And then the day came, and I got my appointment, and I went over to the States with my kids, and I just didn't feel good, I didn't feel at peace."

So, the family came back to Juárez, and Martinez joined Oasis as the shelter coordinator. Her U.S.-born children can cross the border on foot to attend school in El Paso, while she spends her days working to help migrants on journeys like hers. That doesn't mean every day is easy—even with being up

before the sun, she's often not in bed until 10 p.m. But she knows she's where she's supposed to be.

"I really believe that I was born to serve, and so here I am. Even though it's been difficult, it's been very fulfilling for me. Knowing that I'm helping others and serving others has really filled me with a lot of peace. I feel very good about what I'm doing." ■

*Jason Dueck is communications specialist for MCC Canada. Meghan Mast is multimedia storyteller for MCC Canada.*







Photo courtesy of Tomorrow's Foundation/Baishakhi Ghosh

**Evan Strong (second from left) and colleague Melody Raj (third from left) get feedback from mothers in Kolkata, India, about an MCC-supported education project.**

## Serving in India

**Name:** Evan Strong

**Hometown:** Fairfax, Virginia (Oakton Church of the Brethren)

**Assignment:** My role as planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) coordinator is very diverse! I provide PMER support for all our partners' projects, from food security to primary education, peace resolution teams to clean drinking water.

**Typical day:** I primarily work in the MCC India office in the bustling city of Kolkata. Our workday starts with a short devotion and hot cup of chai before diving into our assignments. I review proposals and concept notes, as well as various partner reports. I also collaborate with colleagues to create training modules on various PMER topics, from project planning tools

for communities to innovative ways to evaluate a project from the inside. I occasionally visit our partners in nearby states, learning about the local communities and having conversations with staff on how their projects are going.

**Joys:** My team here is warm, thoughtful and full of laughter. I really enjoy traveling to visit partners; it makes my project proposal and reporting work much more meaningful. I also get to help my team and our partners grow, discuss important topics and test out new tools and technologies.

**“I really enjoy traveling to visit partners; it makes my project proposal and reporting work much more meaningful.”**

**Challenges:** The sheer scope of our India program—we have 28 projects running across five states! It's both a great joy and a challenge to stay up to date on their work.

**On growing with MCC:** I was previously a Serving and Learning Together (SALT) participant in Nepal, working with one of our partners to conduct research on climate change perception, adaptation and resiliency in rural communities. Through SALT, I grew in understanding people from many different backgrounds and core values and practiced my listening and adaptability skills. By working directly with a partner, I learned a lot of practical points of project implementation and social research: the ground realities, logistical challenges and immense joys.

### FIND YOUR PLACE

**MCC is always looking for people to join our work of serving others in the name of Christ. Go to [mcc.org/serve](http://mcc.org/serve) or [linkedin.com/company/mccpeace](http://linkedin.com/company/mccpeace) or contact your nearest MCC office to find MCC service opportunities.**

for children

# hello NEPAL

How can you greet someone in Nepali?

## Namaste

(Say “na-mas-TAY”)



**My name is Priyanka Murmu.**

**Age:** 11

**Lives in:** Jahada, Nepal

I live with my parents, brother, sister, grandmother, great-grandmother and one uncle.

I go to school from Sunday to Friday. My school is not very far, so I walk with my sister and friends. I am in class 7 and like my teachers a lot. After school, I eat and play hide-and-seek and kabbadi (a team-based tag game) with my friends, then study.

I sometimes help my mom in her vegetable garden, and I'd like to have a garden of my own one day. I have another uncle who lives farther away, and he has three goats, an ox and a cow. Cows are my favorite animal because they give us milk. On special occasions, we visit my uncle, and I get to drink the cow's milk.

**My favorite food:** saag (cooked greens) and rice

**My favorite subject:** Nepali

**What I want to be:** teacher



O G R E E N S H C D  
P K T Y T L J C L Z  
M U R H E L I H C A  
Z X M A C L M T O Z  
M M U P R S A D H O  
E D G A K A N Q D T  
J O G J J I P T R A  
I E I U S F N Z F M  
R E D N A I R O C O  
T N A L P G G E V T

### Dig up some veggies!

We've planted eight of the crops that Priyanka's mom and other women in Jahada grow in this word search. Can you unearth all of them? (Some words are spelled backwards.)

- |        |           |
|--------|-----------|
| GREENS | CORIANDER |
| CHILE  | EGGPLANT  |
| GARLIC | OKRA      |
| TOMATO | PUMPKIN   |







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Ukraine

When you sew warm, colorful comforters for MCC, you can foster well-being and peace, piece by piece.  
[mcc.org/comforters](http://mcc.org/comforters)

Malawi

Tailoring skills offer *seamingly* infinite ways to earn income. Help families find new opportunities by assembling MCC sewing kits.  
[mcc.org/kits/sewing](http://mcc.org/kits/sewing)

# Stitching a way to a brighter future

This winter, will you share *shear* joy across the globe?