

Christy: I wonder if it will weird for our listeners to have both of our voices?

Meghan: (laughs) Yeah, it's not often that we're both on the show at the same time.

MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN.

Meghan: Welcome to Relief, Development and Podcast, the show that brings you a more in-depth look at MCC's work around the world.

It's 2025. And we're looking back on last year, where we learned about community-built stoves in Zimbabwe, explored what a just peace looks like in Palestine and Israel. We saw the risks partners are taking to provide relief in Myanmar, went to a prison in Saskatchewan to learn about a program teaching inmates the Enneagram. We took a field trip to Bangladesh to learn about growing safer vegetables. We took you behind the scenes of MCC's emergency relief distribution. And much more.

I'm your host Meghan Mast

Christy: And I'm your other host Christy Kauffman. On today's episode, we're reflecting on the last year. Meghan and I will share some of our favorite moments with you and talk about why they impacted us the way they did. We'd love to hear from you about what your favorite moments were. Send us a message through MCC's Instagram or Facebook and let us know. If you're not yet subscribed to this podcast, take a moment to go into your podcast app. Click "follow" or "subscribe" And this will make sure you don't miss an episode.

You're listening to, "Relief, development and podcast," a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

The first clip I wanted to talk about was from an episode that was quite impactful to record. It reveals or uncovers the lost history of a Black doctor in Appalachia. The main story in the episode is quite long, and it deserves an entire listen through of the episode. But I wanted to share a clip of a community member's reaction to this rediscovery of local history. Vivian Jockely describes the impact of the discovery of the story on her and her community. The episode touches on the importance of preserving Black history in America. It does this by showcasing the accomplishments of a Black doctor who built and ran a hospital on the site that is now MCC's home repair project in Appalachia. And we also reveal some of the injustices he faced in that journey

Vivian Jockley: *What else have we missed? Or what else did we not get? Or what reason did we not understand all of this stuff, you know? And then once the stories started coming out, it's almost like when you turn the pages in a book. And every time you turned another page, you get some new information. That's what the stories are like. And it all, and if you, you connect it out together, we all have a connection to each other, all of us do, based on these little stories that, that that you've heard. So it seems that every time you have a lost story, you find lost history. And once you find the lost history, it makes you know that you're a lot richer than where you started out to be. And that's where I feel like I am with the situation. When you put all of that together, in a way it makes you angry. You know, it kind of ticks you off to think that this was our history that we didn't know nothing about, you know, and why not? It's mind boggling.*

Christy: What does it mean to be able to know that history and be able to link it to now?

Vivian: *It means, it lets me know, that we didn't slough. We were not sloughers. We didn't drag our feet. We really did keep what was going on, going. We did. We produced a lot of things here in Kimball. We produce doctors and lawyers and teachers, lots of teachers. The town, the chief of police was Arthur King, who was a Black man that lived in this town. And it let me know that even though we didn't have all the doors opened to us, we opened a lot of the doors ourselves. And it's made us a lot richer.*

We didn't know that it wasn't the home for nurses. We didn't know what that was. We knew that it was a hospital though, that building that burned down, we knew that that was a hospital. But we didn't know the significance of the hospital. And I can only imagine how hard this doctor worked. And how disappointed he was to be hoodwinked, you know? Or be tricked. And there was a time there when Stevens didn't want black patients. They didn't want us, but we never knew the significance. And I'm sure that if we knew what the significance was then, things would have been different. Yeah. Things would have been different. Yeah.

But it's just, it's awesome. It's almost like you find yourself. You know, there's a piece of you that's missing, and you kind of wonder, where is it, you know? Yeah. And now when we talk about Kimball, they talk with a different tone, about what used to be here, what really used to be here, you know? We just got cheated out of a lot of stuff, and uh, but we didn't let it defeat who we are.

Christy: Yeah, so in this episode, it was a really cool episode to record because it was the revealing of a history that MCC had been discovering over the course of the last few years. And it was really impactful to hear Vivian talk about the importance of this discovery in her community. She thinks about the town even differently. She thinks about ... It just showcases how knowing your history does matter to where you are now; it matters.

Meghan: Yeah, I love this story too. I think it's so special when we get an opportunity to hear these untold histories. And I love the way that she said, even though we got cheated out of a lot of stuff but we didn't let it defeat who we are. I love that she says that and talks about and recognizes the resilience of her community and the way that her community still was creative and able to overcome some of those things.

Christy: Yeah, so this is from the episode: "The Lost Story of Dr. Dismukes: Black History in Appalachia." I highly recommend that you go back and listen to that because of course in this clip we reveal a bit of the community's reaction to some of these lost stories that are being revealed. But the story itself that we reveal in the episode is not in this clip. So we really recommend that you do that.

Meghan: Yeah, absolutely. This next clip I'm going to play is from our episode "Talking Climate, Practicing Peace" with Jessica Stoltzfus Buller. Jes is a facilitator, trainer, mediator and peacebuilder and joined us to talk about how to navigate difficult conversations with more curiosity and compassion, particularly as it relates to climate change. This was a fun show because we had people submit questions for Jes, and she answered them. I was particularly struck by her answer to a question we got from Zacharie.

Zacharie: *Hi, I'm Zacharie, and I live in Quebec, and my province doesn't generally doubt the reality of climate change. People here are proud of hydroelectricity. So, it can be hard to talk about its downsides, such as the impact on the flow of rivers and on Indigenous livelihood and culture. How can I bring up the issues around something people in our province are so proud of without alienating them? Is there a cure for complacency?*

Jes: *Okay, yeah, thanks. Zacharie. Here, I think we're getting into some of the nitty gritty skills of how we do the communication when we're in dialogue with someone. So, I would say to start, validating someone else's opinion is going to be really important. That's a very important place to start. This is actually the work of empathy and active listening. Part of active listening is to paraphrase back. Can we actually repeat what they just said to us? And can we validate their perspective, their experience, their opinion?*

We don't have to agree with someone to listen well to them. I get push back a lot on that, that listening necessarily means agreeing, but I don't think so. I think that we can listen to someone and disagree vehemently with them, and we can say, "Thank you for sharing your opinion. I don't agree with that. I'd like to share my opinion," right? And then you go into your work. But I think if we can't authentically hold someone else's story and opinion, it will be very, very hard to enter into healthy conversation and really transform the conflicts that we have.

And actually, that's backed by brain science. There have been lots of studies that look at the brain and what happens in the brain in conflictive conversation, interpersonal, conflictive conversation. If you're interested in learning more about that, I would encourage you to read Conversational Intelligence by Judith E. Glaser. They look at the ways that when we listen to someone, it actually shifts the ways that their brain is functioning. And as we build trust with people, our bodies physically relax. We start to breathe slower, our pulse starts to slow down, our hands stop sweating. Like, when we're in the midst of conflict, and we feel listened to — actually, physiological changes happen in our body and brain. And so, in many ways, it's important to listen simply because if we listen well to someone, the chances are they're going to be able to listen better to us also. And that slowing down of the conversation benefits both me and the person I'm in communication with, right?

Meghan: I love how she said that you don't have to agree with someone in order to listen well to them. And it's such a good reminder. You know, we're living in an increasingly polarized world and political climate that I think we're all pretty aware of. And I think that we're hungry for ways to connect with people. How can we find common ground? How can we bring people together, while also maintaining our own integrity?

Christy: Yeah, I think it's super applicable to so many conversations that we're having these days with anyone that you might not fully agree with or just someone who has maybe different opinions from you. If you're listening fully to them, it allows for more mutual respect between both parties as well, I think. So, I really love what Jes says here.

Meghan: Yeah I think we can all relate to times when we felt listened to even when the person that we were speaking with didn't agree with us, and those conversations hit so differently than when we feel disrespected or even that sense that you get when you are talking to somebody and you can tell they're just waiting to jump in with their opinion, and they are not actually listening to what you're saying.

I also find myself, though I admit getting quickly upset when it comes to certain things, and my patience evaporates, and it's hard to be patient and listen well. And I think this came through at the very end of the interview. I'll play the clip....

Meghan: *As I'm listening to you, I have to admit, I keep thinking...so much of this requires being the bigger person and working hard to extend people grace and respect. And I can't help but think, what if the person you are talking to doesn't deserve it? Sometimes people act in bad faith and won't engage respectfully. What do you do in those situations?*

Jes: *I would be really cautious about saying, if someone does not deserve respect and dignity of being listened to. I think often that would that comes from a place of pain, or it comes from something that's under there. Ever since I was little, my mom used to say, you can only control yourself. You can only control yourself. And I think that's the essence of dialogue work. Like, we bring what we know to be authentic and transformative, and people can choose to engage with us or not. I do think when we apply the skills of healthy dialogue, we do have some power to start to shift the other person a little bit. But even more so to me, the question is, how do I practice this? How do I do it? Because it's not only to change them or the issue, but it's because it also changes me. It makes me a better person. The longer that I have been working on this, the better I am, because I see the humanity in someone else more quickly, more easily, because I'm practicing it, because I'm thinking about it. It just shifts how I see the world. And even if that's the only reason to do it, I think it's worth it.*

Meghan: It makes me cringe a little bit listening to that again because I think I sound so self-righteous. But also, it's an authentic moment, and I think probably some of our listeners have the same-ish question. Jes's response was so great. You know, of course everyone deserves respect and dignity, even when we don't agree with them. It's common sense when you say it out loud, but it's hard to remember in the moment. And I think, going back to what Jes said earlier, that doesn't mean we need to agree with what they're saying, but we can still work towards seeing the humanity in them.

Christy: Yeah, it's a vulnerable thing that you put this in as a selection. I like what she says at the end there that listening takes practice and intension. I think that's also something to point out — that peaceful practices don't come naturally all the time and that it does take practice. Hence the name.

This next clip is from the second part of a two-part episode that came out in March of last year with Jonathan Kuttab and Alain Epp Weaver. The first part of the episode was really looking at what is going on in Gaza, at the time of recording in late January of 2024. The second part, which this clip is drawn from, was more so looking into the stories and history of nonviolent resistance within Palestinian Christian communities over the course of the last 75 years since the Nakba. Jonathan is a Palestinian human rights lawyer, and he really draws you in, not just with his storytelling about his lived experience but also the applications and learnings he had from those moments where he still is living out nonviolent resistance as a Palestinian Christian. So enjoy this story of nonviolent resistance and know that this is just one of many stories.

Jonathan: *And one of the stories that I told here was a personal story where I decided to stand in front of a bulldozer that was trying to destroy part of a Palestinian farm. And it was, in retrospect, was a very frightening thing. And it happened, where there was actually nobody around: no journalists, no cameras. I had told the Mukhtar, the leader of this village whose lands, the village lands, were about to be taken and confiscated by the Israelis. And so he came to my office as a lawyer. And I said, "OK, as a lawyer, I will try and help you, but law is only 5%. Ninety-five percent of the work belongs to you. You have to defend your land."*

He says, "How can we? We don't have any guns?"

I said, "No, no, no, not with guns. You have to be willing to stand if it has to be even in front of bulldozers and assert your ownership nonviolently."

Well, one day, I get this call from him, that the Israelis with bulldozers are trying to take our land; please come. So I jump into my car, and I go to the village, and he meets me at the village. And we

walk out toward the land, and there's nobody. There's just one Israeli bulldozer that's working. What I didn't know is that the army had come and arrested all the villagers.

So I said, "Well, you and I have to do what we said we were going to do." So we stood in front of the bulldozer, and the driver of the bulldozer didn't want to have any trouble. He left the bulldozer. And then an armed settler jumped in the cockpit, revved up the engine, started working. He had a big gun next to him, and so I stood in front of the bulldozer, and he stood behind it so the bulldozer couldn't move back or forward. And I realized, you know, there's only us and this armed settler.

And so I told them, you know, here, you know, there's of course no signal there for cell phones, I said, "Here, go run into the village. Call my brother, who can call some journalists," because my understanding of nonviolence at that time is you have to have cameras and people to witness what's happening. So all that was left was me and this settler. And now that the Mukhtar had left, he could back up the bulldozer and come at me. So I turned around; there was this little pile of rubble that he was clearing and that I was standing in front of. And it was, you know, I looked and I said, "My God, I'm gonna die today. It's a good day to die."

And then I got the tremendous inspiration that I would turn around and have my back to him instead of my face. Maybe I didn't want to see my own death, and maybe I felt, I thought, you know, here I was. I wanted to make it clear that I wasn't trying to attack him. I know if I had reached down to grab a stone, he would have shot me on the spot. Suddenly the guy stopped and turned off his engine. And then I realized it's really hard to kill somebody who is not presenting you with any threat, but who's not running away from you either. And that nonviolence works, even if nobody else is observing, because it operates on the insides of the person, your insides and his insides, as well as third parties. So it was a big lesson for me in nonviolence at that time.

Christy: Yeah, you didn't even have to have someone witness it, in order for it to ...

Jonathan: Exactly, It was enough that I knew what was happening, and he knew what was happening. Later, I wrote an article about how nonviolence really operates on three different battlefields. The first and the more, most important is yourself. The oppressed people, they have to overcome their fear, they have to be strong, they have to be disciplined, to find a way to be both — to resist and at the same time not to use violence and not to run away. The second battlefield is you're operating on the hearts and minds of your oppressor. And third, of course, you're operating on third parties who could intervene in solidarity or in support or in sanctions or whatever involvement they can have. Actually, I've I even wrote that up in Arabic and shared it with some of the Hamas leadership, that this is what nonviolence is. It doesn't mean you just refrain from using weapons; you have to be actively confronting and dealing with the oppression and the oppressor.

Christy: It takes a bit more effort to find the creative solutions that isn't violence, and it isn't doing nothing either. There's a bit of creativity.

Jonathan: It takes a lot, a lot more effort, discipline, resources, commitment and sacrifices. People think that if you're nonviolent, that that guarantees that the other side will be nonviolent. No! Sometimes they get more violent, and you have to be willing to accept the price. It's funny how people think that, that violence, it's okay. It requires a lot of weapons and discipline and preparation, and lots of people will die and that's fine. But if you're nonviolent, they're not willing to invest even a portion of the resources and the discipline and the commitment and accepting sacrifices, as you do in a violent struggle.

Christy: I think that this, I mean there was a lot of weight on this conversation in general. This was January 2024 with a Palestinian human rights lawyer. And he has done so much work on talking

about nonviolent resistance in his context. And I think the thing he mentioned right at the end there is actually something I think about often, thinking about being a pacifist and thinking about the possibilities. If all the armed struggles, if we put as much resources and commitment and willing to sacrifice for peace and the way of nonviolence with all the resources we do with violence, with militarism, it's incomprehensible what that result would be. But, yeah, this was a big conversation, and this is just a small story of that conversation, of some of the lived experiences of what he had.

Meghan: Yeah, wow. I was really struck by the moment when he says that it's really hard to kill somebody who is not presenting you with any threat. It's such a vivid, like you know, it brings us to that moment when he turns his back, and he thinks he's going to die. It's such a risk he took. And then also when he said that nonviolence works, even if no one else is observing because it operates on the insides of the person. That was very cool. It's hard for a lot of us to imagine the kind of courage, the kind of courage it takes to take a stand like that. So many of us I think will never know that kind of courage.

Christy: And this episode was recorded nearly a year ago now. But I know that he would have a lot more to say today on the subject of what's happening in the lives of Palestinians. So that episode was: "Nonviolent Resistance: Just Peace in Palestine and Israel Part II."

Meghan: Thanks, Christy. This next clip that I want to play also features or features two Palestinian men. It was called "Christ Still Under the Rubble." Even though we had just played the episode, I really felt, I felt like it really needed to be included as I was thinking about which clips and moments were my favorite. So, yeah, this episode will probably be familiar to a lot of our listeners. But it's worth hearing again. This is from a conversation between two Palestinian Christians and friends, Rev. Munther Isaac and Anthony Khair. Two men who have endured so much loss and suffering this year. It's a powerful episode I'd recommend you listen to in full if you haven't already heard it.

Isaac: *We cannot allow ourselves to grow numb as if it's just part of life that we receive breaking news, another bombing in Gaza, and as another bomb, another missile, 50 people were killed, including 15 children. And we just said, "Yeah, we expect this." I think if this happens, then it's about not just our integrity, but our Christian witness. If we believe in the God of righteousness, justice, the God who was embodied in Jesus. Jesus was the embodiment of mercy, compassion, love. And then we turn a blind eye to a genocide, or we get used to a genocide. I think that's seriously wrong.*

Therefore, even 13 months after, as we get ready to another Christmas season, let's continue to talk about what's happening in Palestine. Let's continue to plead and pray for a cease fire.

And in times like this, I think we have to be aware that people are looking for a voice of comfort. One of the lessons I've learned throughout the last year from my different traveling and the messages, and I can tell you all my messages I receive on my social media, that many people ask the question, "Where was the church? Where is the church?"

And I say with pain in my heart, I've met so many people who told me we stopped going to church after the war. And they say so for different reasons, some because the church is not talking about Gaza, they're traumatized and the church seems not to care. Or others are troubled by God. Where is God in the midst of this?

And when we are silent, we give also the impression that God does not care. So we need to be where we need to be as a church. The church belongs to the street. The church should lead ministries of healing, of comfort, advocate for justice and show that the solidarity of God with the

oppressed must become our solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized. We must show that, not just in words, but in our actions.

When Jesus said, "I was a prisoner, and you visited me." Visitation means you are present. You are in solidarity with those who are oppressed. This is the role of the church. And as I said, 13 months after the war has started, and Christmas, we hope it's over by then. We cannot stop talking about Gaza, and we cannot stop pleading for justice, for truth and for an end to this war.

Anthony: *Thank you. And I would love to say something that from what you said, yes, people go to church to find a voice of comfort. Yet today, I think it's more important to make people uncomfortable. We're sick of making people comfortable and hearing a word of hope, a word of love and a word of forgiveness when that's not what we want to hear. What we want to say now is, "Make people uncomfortable." And we don't care if you're comfortable or not, it's time for this genocide to stop. And it's honestly horrendous that even after 13 months, we're still asking for a ceasefire, not even a stop to the genocide, but just a ceasefire. It is truly horrific that we have to still be asking for this. But let's continue making people uncomfortable.*

Meghan: This conversation was so powerful. And Gaza has been on my mind all year, and it's been hard not to feel discouraged. It continues to feel hard not to be discouraged. Hearing Rev. Munther say that we cannot give up, we need to keep talking about Palestine is such a good reminder. And if Palestinians can keep moving forward, then the rest of us owe them that much. And I think many people may not know that MCC began their work in 1948 right after the Nakba, which is an Arabic word for catastrophe that was also the same year the state of Israel was established.

Christy: And there's a reason for that because of the needs that the Nakba created and the oppression that has been there for that long.

Meghan: Absolutely. And I think MCC is well placed to raise awareness about what's happening in Palestine because we have been there for so long. Actually, one of my first story-gathering trips with MCC was to Palestine and Israel for the A Cry for Home campaign. We captured stories of the human rights abuses Israel perpetuates against Palestinians, like controlling people's access to water, food, electricity, freedom to move. We met people who had their homes demolished by the Israeli army. We spoke with people who were separated from family members because of the apartheid wall. We spoke with a young person who had been arrested and spent time in prison for allegedly throwing a stone. And all of this wasn't even in Gaza, it was in the West Bank. And, of course, we know that the human rights abuses and oppression is even worse for Palestinians living in Gaza, even before last October.

I remember meeting Palestinian Christians too for the first time, and hearing them say, we were the first Christians. MCC brings learning tours to Palestine and Israel, and a lot of people don't even realize that there are Palestinian Christians.

Christy: Yeah, or they might think that they were Muslim and then they became Christian. There's that perception.

Meghan: Yeah, I think I'll think about that conversation for a long time, and I think we are so lucky that we were able to capture that conversation.

Christy: Yeah, we've gotten to speak with some really incredible people over the course of the year. These people that we get to be curious about, they're really incredible people.

Meghan: We owe a big thank you to all our guests this year who've been on the show and also to you, our listeners. Thank you for *being here*.

Christy: This episode is a bit special because it's both me and Meghan on the podcast episode speaking to each other, which I know you don't hear. But it's actually a special episode because Meghan will be saying goodbye soon.

Meghan: Yeah, this is going to be my second last episode. I'm going to produce one more next month, and then I'm leaving MCC. It's been 10 years of working here. Christy and I have worked together for a good chunk of that, and, yeah, the podcast has been a real highlight of the job for me. Starting it during the pandemic, and it's been a really cool way to connect directly with people on the ground when we haven't been able to travel there. And it continues to be, I think, a really meaningful way to go deeper into exploring the work that MCC does and talking to some of the really interesting people that you heard of taste of on this episode. So, it'll be goodbye, but I feel like I'm leaving the podcast in really good hands with Christy and whoever comes after me.

Christy: Yes. She'll be missed!

That's it for this episode. We're busy planning the next season of the podcast. We're working on a story about peace libraries in Rwanda, a new meat cannery in Ontario, and environmental protection in Cambodia. So look forward to those.

We also want to hear from you! Let us know if there is an area where MCC works that you want to learn more about, get in touch on MCC's social media. We make this show for you and want to make sure that it stays relevant and meaningful for our listeners.

Meghan: If you're not yet subscribed to this podcast, take a minute to go into your podcast app and click "follow." This makes sure you won't miss an episode.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was produced on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. This episode was hosted and produced by me, Meghan Mast, and Christy Kauffman. The head producer is Leslie Boctor.

A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ. Thank you for listening.