

# A refuge in Cairo | A mother's persistence | Farmers helping farmers in Zimbabwe





Cover photo: These young adults, assisted by an MCC partner when they arrived as refugees in Cairo, Egypt, now help and empower other refugees. (MCC photo/Roger Anis)

# A Common Place

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## Grains of wheat

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER  
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

(John 12:24, NRSV)

There are two clusters of wheat in my office. They were gathered on different continents and more than a decade apart. But both were from times when MCC faced great challenges, and a nearby wheat field offered a ready reminder of Jesus’ words of challenge and promise.

As we enter fully into the Easter season, I ponder the sacrifices Jesus made for us in accepting the cup of suffering—and what it must have cost Mary to give up her son.

In this issue you will find stories of dying to self and of the seeds of new life—whether in refugee communities in Cairo, Egypt, or in a mother’s determination to better her family’s life in Bangladesh.

As I visited the refugee program featured in the cover story, or as I sit around our dining room table in Virginia with newly arrived teenage refugees, I feel in my bones the tremendous will to learn and grow in a new place. Though something dies when one is forced from home or leaves by choice, new growth is possible. I am grateful MCC can be part of that growth.

And, alongside our Anabaptist communities around the world, I celebrate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism and give thanks for MCC’s work with Anabaptist churches in 26 countries. Read how our partnership with the Brethren in Christ Compassionate and Development Services in Zimbabwe is helping farmers adapt to changes in climate and produce a better harvest.

Jesus’ words are as true today as they were 2,000 years ago. Even though death has been conquered, and resurrection is evident every day, we live in the “not yet,” waiting on full redemption.

As we do, I give thanks for each of you and all the ways you have offered yourself, your prayers, your resources and your time to help produce seeds of new life.

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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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## MCC news

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### School Kit Challenge Join us in August

A new school year brings new lessons, new friendships and new possibilities for kids around the world. But without the proper supplies, it’s hard for children to engage in the classroom and remember all they’ve learned. Through MCC’s annual School Kit Challenge, you can help the young people in your life learn about the barriers to education that kids like them often face—and how packing colorful cloth bags with essential school supplies can help. Will you help us pack 25,000 school kits in August 2025? See what goes into each kit below and find fun lesson plans—in English and Spanish—

on the impact school supplies can make at [mcc.org/school-kit-challenge](http://mcc.org/school-kit-challenge).



### Guatemala Seeing God everywhere

In her time working with K’ekchi’ Maya youth through MCC’s Seed program, Lilibeth Guzmán Macea of Colombia has experienced great hospitality, despite the challenges of being a Spanish-speaker serving K’ekchi’-speaking Mennonite communities. “Feeling God through their prayers in K’ekchi’, to feel the pains and worries with which they pray, has made me see God in the midst of this great linguistic barrier.” Read more at [mcc.org/seeing-god-everywhere](http://mcc.org/seeing-god-everywhere).



### Nepal A refreshing change of pace

Why is it so important for MCC and our partners to help families get clean water close to home? Well, these efforts can prevent illness and give women peace of mind and more time to earn income. Deepa Mandal Paswan’s house is one of 53 in Jahada Rural Municipality to get a pump from MCC partner Sahayogi Hatharuko Samuha (Group of Helping Hands, SAHAS) Nepal. Before, she would retrieve water from her brother’s house but worried about disturbing him. “I feel easier and better when I have my own water pump,” she says.

## How do I pack a school kit?

Each MCC school kit contains essential supplies, tucked into a colorful cloth bag that a child can use as a backpack for years to come.

### Contents (NEW items only)

- 4 spiral or perforated-page notebooks, about 8.5 in x 11 in and approx. 70 sheets each (250-350 sheets total)
- 12 colored pencils (in packaging)
- 1 large eraser
- 8 new, unsharpened pencils
- 4 new black or blue ballpoint pens
- 1 ruler (flat, good quality; must indicate 30 cm - inch markings optional)
- 1 small all-metal pencil sharpener (one or two holes)

Sew your own double-drawstring cloth bags (12 in x 16 ¾ in) or request bags from a material resources center near you. You can also donate supplies for MCC to pack on your behalf.

Visit [mcc.org/get-involved/kits/school](http://mcc.org/get-involved/kits/school) to learn more and find drop-off locations. Or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).







Rina Deuri (at left in 2002 and at right in 2025) has been a papermaking artisan at Biborton Handmade Paper in Agailjhara, Bangladesh, since 1993, earning income that has changed life for her and her family.



See a video of Rina's story and more photos of Rina's family then and now. Scan this QR code or go to [mcc.org/a-mothers-story](https://mcc.org/a-mothers-story).

Feature story

# A mother's persistence

## Seizing opportunity, changing her family's future

STORY BY MARLA PIERSON LESTER  
2025 PHOTOS BY JULIE KAUFFMAN  
2002 PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LESTER

Rina Deuri had a dream that drove her. It pushed her through days of dipping sheaths of handmade paper into vats of dyes whose colors she carefully mixed to a specific hue. It fueled her through evenings when she made paper products at home for extra income.

"It was my target," she says. "That I make my children educated."

Today, her son Anjan leans over a patient in his dental clinic in the rural southern Bangladesh community of Agailjhara, where he was raised.

And that's not all.

"I wanted to be a nurse, but I couldn't," Rina says. "But my daughter is now a nurse."

Her daughter Antara moves easily among colleagues on a floor of one of the most renowned hospitals in Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka, balancing her shifts and caring for a newborn son she hopes will someday be a doctor. "She sacrificed everything for the two of us," Antara says of her mother.

Like parents across the globe, Rina wanted her children to have what she could not.

Growing up as the oldest of seven children in Agailjhara—a rich, green landscape of rice fields and

waterways, prone to flooding and cyclones—Rina thought of how she would care for all the people through nursing.

But her father had few resources, and she left school at 13 when her parents arranged a marriage for her.

Her husband Anil's education ended when his father died, leaving him without the money to finish. His brothers, who by the culture he would normally turn to for help, had migrated outside of Bangladesh.

Anil found what work he could, but it wasn't enough for the young family.

Early in her marriage, Rina says, she didn't fully understand her situation or the challenges she was facing.

Then, as she did, "I grew more and more frustrated, because I realized my father is poor and my husband has no education."

"What can I do now?"

Rina took action.

She had seen Biborton Handmade Paper, then an MCC job creation project, and showed up there in 1993, asking for work. Her husband had asked her not to go, she says.

As she met with the manager, "I told him I need the job very much," she recalls. "I must work here."

**“She sacrificed everything for the two of us.”**

MCC began the Biborton Handmade Paper project in 1993 as one of a number of MCC job creation projects in Bangladesh, including five in Agailjhara. (Today it operates under an independent fair trade enterprise, Prokritee, which grew out of MCC's work.)

The aim was to provide sustainable income for rural women and to empower them—a great need in a region where incomes were low, hunger frequent and education most often out of reach.

Rina joined the ranks of papermaking artisans. After collecting water hyacinth, an invasive species growing freely in the area's numerous canals and ponds, they chop it and transform it into handmade paper and paper products sold across the globe through retailers and organizations like Ten Thousand Villages.

The changes in her family's life were tangible and immediate.

Rina, in a 2002 interview, shared that with her new earnings, her family could eat twice as much rice as they did before she worked with Biborton.

She could pay school fees and meet other needs for her children, then 12 and 5. And her income helped her husband to grow a business hauling people or supplies in a flatbed bicycle cart, and to find other ways to improve his earnings.



But the growth wasn't just in her home life. When Biborton needed to produce a new color sample, the task went first to Rina. She would mix the environmentally safe dye, then swirl it with water hyacinth and recycled paper until the color was uniform. Her trained eye helped to match precise shades of color to customers' specifications, and then she would teach the other artisans how to reproduce that hue. Rina had never traveled to Bangladesh's capital Dhaka until Biborton sent her to training workshops and to serve as a craft demonstrator at an international trade fair. Meanwhile, at home, her son Anjan, then 12, would lean over his English homework in the evening.



In the years to come, as Anjan and his sister Antara grew, Rina lived up to her commitment to herself to keep them in school. Rina stresses that Biborton was a powerful support, with leaders walking alongside her and her family. Biborton provides a regular infusion of savings for each artisan. Artisans can add to that fund and take out loans. But even with her steady income and her husband's, making ends meet and paying for school was a stretch. Her determination pushed her to find a way forward. The steps to success began to add up—finishing secondary school, going on for higher education and training. But so did the costs. Rina and Anil took out loans. They sold their house and land, moving to a smaller plot and working to pay off the money they had borrowed. Today, though, the tide is turning. “I see a change in my life now that my son earns money,” Rina says. Anjan has his own dental clinic—and dreams of opening more clinics. After finishing his studies and training, Anjan came back to Agailjhara where he was raised, seeking to provide affordable dental care to the community. He relishes his time with his parents, both in the daily rhythm of life and in holidays and special celebrations. He, his wife and two children live with Rina and Anil as he saves money to build a new house. Just as he once walked his younger sister to school, he now takes his daughter Angela.



“Everything I got from my mom.”

Antara Deuri plays at home in 2002 in Agailjhara (top photo), and, in 2025, is with colleagues at the hospital in Dhaka where she works (middle left photo; Deuri wears a sari).

Anjan Dueri studies at home in 2002 (middle right photo) and treats a patient at his Agailjhara dental clinic in 2025 (bottom right photo).



Rina and Anil Deuri with their daughter Antara and son Anjan in 2002 (top photo). In 2025 Antara Deuri with her husband Aliman Hazra and their infant Ehan Hazra (middle photo). Anjan Deuri in 2025 with his wife Rinku Panday, daughter Angela and son Aaryan (bottom photo).

He points to the homes surrounding the land where the family lives. With all these homes around, he says, he is one of the few who is educated. He gives his mother the credit—for what he's gained, and for what he's been able to provide for his children. “Everything I got from my mom,” he says. The giving and growing that Rina has done doesn't stop there. It's on display daily at Biborton as she invests in training younger artisans, hoping they too will earn income that can change their families. “And they will be able to send their children to school. And their children will be educated just like mine.” ■

### Multiplying the impact

This is just one example of how seeds MCC planted through projects years ago continue to generate new growth. Begun by MCC in 1993, Biborton Handmade Paper is now one of 10 handcraft centers run by Prokritee. This independent global fair trade enterprise grew out of MCC's decades of job creation work in rural Bangladesh starting in the 1970s. Prokritee now sells handcrafted products to retailers and organizations in 27 countries, including long-time partner Ten Thousand Villages in the U.S.







Abel\* helped to start the Eritrean Refugee School in Ard el Liwa. This bustling, high-density neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt, has a large refugee population.

Cover  
story

## A refuge in Cairo

On the front lines of global displacement, an MCC partner in Egypt serves refugees, empowering them to meet urgent needs in their communities.

STORY BY LESLIE MINA  
PHOTOS BY ROGER ANIS

*\*Pseudonyms used for security reasons.*

**A**s Abel\* pulls shut the massive iron doors of the Eritrean Refugee School, he sighs and reflects out loud. “Every day, every hour, I worry about this school and every student.”

Horns blare and tuk-tuks whiz by as he locks the gates after the last of the students pour out into the alley and toward their homes in Cairo, Egypt’s capital and largest city. Excited banter fills the alley as the students walk home together at the end of the school day.

Abel is a volunteer teacher and the assistant general manager of this community-run school. His daily worries are far-ranging. Will the children arrive home safely? Can the school continue to afford high rent for the three-story apartment building it uses for classrooms? Will there be educators willing to volunteer as teachers?





Abel was one of the original teachers who started the school in 2017 in Ard el Liwa, a high-density neighborhood in Cairo with a large refugee population. He's the driving force behind the extensive volunteer effort to sustain the school and prepare students for their future.

"It's the kids who inspire me," he says. "When they call out to me, 'Teacher, teacher,' [I feel] the respect of our culture. It shows they are gaining something from our efforts. So, this is a blessing for us."

Support for this community-run refugee school is one of the many ways that MCC partner St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) builds capacity in refugee communities in Cairo and empowers volunteer leaders to meet the urgent needs in their neighborhoods.

This year, four community-based schools like the Eritrean Refugee School are receiving support from StARS in partnership with MCC.

Each school, operated primarily by volunteer staff and teachers, is a testament to the tremendous collective will and energy within Cairo's refugee communities to educate their children. But starting these schools and keeping them going is not easy.

Amira\*, StARS' early childhood well-being coordinator, travels across Cairo neighborhoods every week to provide teacher training at refugee community schools and help boost their efforts.

**"When they call out to me, 'Teacher, teacher,' ... It shows they are gaining something from our efforts."**



Children (above) at the Eritrean Refugee School learn in Arabic, Tigrinya and English. MCC also supports three other community-run schools, including this kindergarten (left).



"On our first visit to these community refugee schools, we find the place is empty. There is no furniture the kids can sit on. There are just empty rooms, where the kids sit on the floor," Amira says. "So, we see with our eyes that these children need our support."

StARS' MCC-funded programs provide teacher training, grants for school fees and furniture for classrooms. Teacher training is building the capacity of volunteer educators as they organize and run programs and implement academic standards.

"This is for their future," says Amira. "Whether they go back to their countries or whether they stay [in Cairo], they will be able to help themselves. We want to empower refugees to help themselves."

Amira says StARS' support for the schools has a domino effect in family life.

"We see the lives of the children improve, and their mothers' lives improve because they leave their children and go and work without fear. They feel safe because their community members are running these community organizations," she says.

Cairo is affectionately called the "mother of the world" by Egyptians. Nestled alongside grand architec-

ture from the Mamluk, Ottoman and Belle Époque eras are neighborhoods where daily life is a struggle. Food prices have soared; the price of bread recently quadrupled. Amid this grim economic reality, the city is on the frontlines of global displacement, with asylum seekers and refugees coming to the mother of the world in the hope of finding safety and some security.

The Egyptian government estimates there are 9 million refugees in Egypt. With a population of 22.6 million, Cairo has one of the largest urban refugee populations in the world. Most refugees live in Greater Cairo and Alexandria, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The majority are unregistered

and without residency status in Egypt, leaving them more vulnerable to deportation.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates there are 246,000 school-age refugee and asylum-seeking children in Egypt, approximately half of whom were out of school in October 2024. Without residency status, attending school is a far-off dream. Many refugee children are left alone at home while parents work long hours.

Community schools provide a safe haven as well as an education. At the Eritrean Refugee School, the children are well on their way to being trilingual, speaking Arabic, Tigrinya and English.

Children pour out of the Eritrean Refugee School at the end of the day.



UNICEF estimates that there are 246,000 school-age refugee and asylum-seeking children in Egypt.





**“When you come to Egypt at a young age, with no family or relatives at all, it’s really difficult.”**

— Adam\* (pictured above)

The grade three class excitedly rattles off different classification features of the animal kingdom in English.

Like Amira, more than 80% of StARS’ staff are themselves refugees. They know the ups and downs of adapting to life in Cairo as a refugee—from getting around the bustling city to navigating language barriers to the bullying or harassment that can happen in the workplace or on the street.

StARS champions their refugee experience, leveraging their resourcefulness and creativity—and giving them opportunities to build their skills and develop from clients to valued staff.

In turn, staff, like Adam\*, a 24-year-old Eritrean, bring their firsthand experience into their work with newly arrived refugees. Adam arrived in Cairo at 17, with no connections in the city, next to no money in his pocket, and no phone. He remembers his anxiety as he sat in the waiting room of Naimo Center, a StARS-run program that helps unaccompanied refugee children find their feet in the mega-metropolis.

Today, he is a StARS caseworker at Naimo who is part of implementing the programs for unaccompanied youth that helped ease his migration journey.

“When you come to Egypt at a young age, with no family or relatives at all, it’s really difficult,” he says.

“You miss the way you were communicating with people back home. You miss the foods you used to eat—you miss everything. It’s very challenging to pass through this at a young age.”

About 40 young refugees a day, some as young as 10, walk

The Eritrean Refugee School serves students from junior kindergarten to grade eight.



It’s graduation day at Naimo Center for a group of refugee youth who have reached level four in the English language.

through the large gates of Naimo Center for the first time.

They have traveled to Egypt without their families, arriving from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, sometimes from as far away as Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Some have escaped forced conscription. Many have been exploited on their journeys to Egypt and have witnessed and even experienced violence.

Staff are sensitive to the anxiety and fear etched on the faces of newcomers who wait for their intake appointments on the first floor. They greet them with warmth and smiles, like friends they have been expecting.

Adam and other caseworkers meet with newly arrived youth to make plans toward stability, including help with getting enrolled in school, assistance with UNHCR registration, job training or housing.

The five-story building that houses the center is a welcoming hub of English classes, mentoring, counseling, support for young mothers and a book club. Laughter, warm greetings and music echo throughout the halls.

On this day, the book club is discussing the nonfiction

book *Atomic Habits*, a remarkable accomplishment considering most youth didn’t speak English a few years ago.

StARS staff know it’s vital to keep a sense of hope alive, but also a sense of fun. So everyone is looking forward to a graduation party for a group of refugee youth who have reached level four in English language classes.

Each student is handed a certificate to a round of hearty cheering and applause. The sun is streaming into the room, and the graduation theme song is blaring: *Look who we are, we are the dreamers; We make it happen 'cause we believe it*—a song fitting for today’s occasion.

Moments after the last certificate is awarded, a dance party breaks out. Regardless of language, everyone in the room seems to know the lyrics to every song, along with dance styles from each country. For today, their vulnerability and struggles seem to fade—it’s time to dance and celebrate this milestone of hope in their young lives. ■

*Leslie Mina served as interim marketing and communication manager for MCC Canada. Roger Anis is a freelance photographer in Cairo.*

## Give a gift — Help and welcome for refugees in a new land

When people are forced from home, parents struggle to find schooling for their children, and young adults grapple with finding their place and building skills for a brighter future. You can help meet immediate needs, provide opportunity and support efforts for peace and justice. Give in the enclosed envelope, online at [mcc.org/donate](https://mcc.org/donate) or by calling MCC U.S. toll free at 888.563.4676.





First  
person

# Asim\*

## A caseworker with an MCC partner in Egypt shares about his work with refugees.

AS TOLD TO LESLIE MINA

*\*Pseudonym used for security reasons.*

**A**s a psychosocial caseworker for St. Andrew's Refugee Services in Cairo, Egypt, I basically follow clients socially, medically and psychologically.

I screen clients every day, and I conduct phone calls to follow up. Even when the clients live far away, I call them to know what's going on and ask them about the situation. I also work with young children. I go to the community school, and I see all the kids who have troubles dealing with other kids and sit with them, and I create activities for them and help them interact with their fellow students in a better way.

I come from a generation of refugees. My grandpa fled his home in Sudan when he was persecuted because of his religion, and we settled down in Darfur in 2003.

Darfur then had a war, and then we were forced to go to Khartoum, and then Khartoum had a war, and then I had to bring my family here to Egypt.

So this refugee life is my life. It's what I live for. It's literally the most important thing to me, helping these people and seeing them happy, laughing, smiling and thanking you. There's no better satisfaction in life than this. I see the most vulnerable people cry every day—in interviews, in screenings, during coffee ceremony—everywhere I see them crying.

If I am able to be part of the smile that comes to their faces after that moment, that's all I need in life. Nothing more, nothing less. Those smiles, they are my bread and butter.

I have been lucky to create a couple of new programs in our community. One is a cinema program for children from ages 5 to 18. We share videos of movies using a projector. We provide transportation and popcorn and refreshments.

After the movie, there is a social or psychological awareness session and then a session of games and activities. During the sessions, we talk to the children about what's

going on in their lives, if they are talking to their parents, and if they are interacting with them.

Most refugee children nowadays don't have someone at home asking them things.

Parents are working in the factories for 12 hours a day. They come home tired, and they don't keep track of the children very well. They don't ask them: What do you take in school? How do you enjoy your life?

So having someone who does this instead of their parents is very important for their self-esteem.

During these movie days, we tell the kids that we are here for you today, that the whole community organization has come to you to show you that you are great, and that your life has meaning.

The other program that I started was a book club. We collect books from the community. I think we now have more than 180 books collected from the community. Why do I insist that the books have to come from people in the community?

Because contributing gives meaning to their lives.

We give the clients books for 14 days. In seven days, we will call and ask how they are doing with the book.

Also, we have book club sessions where everyone can participate. We discuss what they got from the book, what was difficult, what they agreed with, what they did not agree with.

We also have coffee ceremony sessions for a group of women, often single women. They are usually the most vulnerable.

We first conduct awareness sessions and psychological support planning. We chat and share our common problems, and we share the solutions that work for us, since we all face common trauma. Perhaps this inspires others to better deal with their situations. ■

**“If I am able to be part of the smile that comes to their faces after that moment, that's all I need in life.”**

*Asim is a caseworker for MCC partner St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), which provides support services to refugees in Cairo, Egypt.*





Feature story

## Farmers helping farmers

In Zimbabwe, lead farmers share techniques to adapt to a changing climate.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNALEE GIESBRECHT

**T**shwaliteng Dube and Christopher Magwala are longtime family friends. Their homesteads in the Gwanda district of Zimbabwe neighbor each other, and their children are even married, making them in-laws as well. They’ve lived and farmed beside each other longer than they can remember.

They’re also lead farmers in a project called Locally-Led Indigenous Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation in Zimbabwe (or LINCZ), which is a multiyear MCC project funded by Global Affairs Canada.

On their own farms, Dube and Magwala are implementing conservation agriculture techniques they’ve learned through MCC partner Brethren in Christ Compassionate and Development Services (BIC-CDS).

And they’re teaching those techniques to fellow farmers in the surrounding community, hoping to help others also strengthen their resilience to the effects of climate change and drought.

“We act as bridges,” Magwala says. “We’re helping other farmers do conservation agriculture as well.”

Rural Gwanda district, located in Matabeleland South prov-

ince, is in a region characterized by lower rainfall and is prone to droughts. In recent years, however, rainfall has become even more unpredictable, making it difficult for farmers to know when to plant their crops. Yields have declined, and many farming families in the region are having to buy more food, a significant strain on already-scarce resources.

In times of severe drought, like in 2023 and 2024, water and food must be prioritized for families, leaving little for the animals traditionally used by farmers to plow the earth ahead of planting. Many animals have either died or else lack the strength to pull farming implements.

It has become clear to farmers like Dube and Magwala that the way they farm needs to change. They can no longer rely on oxen to pull a plow, and making the most of every drop of the scarce rain that falls has become essential. Nothing can go to waste.

Enter conservation agriculture or, as farmers call it, CA. This method of farming aims to make the most of scarce resources by preserving the quality of soil, reducing erosion and maximizing the efficiency of available water. Its three key principles are disturbing the soil as little as possible; covering the soil through mulch; and rotating crops through different fields or intercropping in a single field.

While Dube was already familiar with some principles of conservation agriculture, the training she and Magwala have received through BIC-CDS offered new techniques.

One practice is digging infiltration pits. These pits or trenches capture water when it rains. Then that water will filter into the soil horizontally and provide moisture to plants nearby.

Another key technique is the use

of planting basins. Seeds are planted in small depressions that are evenly spaced throughout the field. These depressions, like the infiltration pits, capture water when it rains and concentrate it near the seedlings, helping them to grow.

“If there is rain, no matter how little it is, with CA you get results,” Dube says.

Learning how to grow plants with significantly reduced tilling has been especially useful to Dube and Magwala, as they no longer have to secure access to an animal to pull a plow.

But the best part about conservation agriculture, according to Dube and Magwala?

It produces better results.

For those who follow all the prac-

**“We act as bridges. We’re helping other farmers do conservation agriculture as well.”**

tices of conservation agriculture, Dube says, the difference can be seen.

In maize or corn, for instance, the size of a cob grown using conservation agriculture is visibly bigger than those grown with traditional tech-

niques, she says.

Yet, while conservation agriculture techniques help crops to thrive under harsh conditions and allow farmers to maximize small amounts of water, they still require at least a little bit of water.

While droughts have always been a reality in Zimbabwe, in 2023 and 2024, most of sub-Saharan Africa, including Zimbabwe, was hit with a severe drought that resulted in widespread crop failure and depletion of water sources like rivers and streams.

“It’s just too much,” says Gugulethu Nyathi, project officer for BIC-CDS. “You know, farmers failing to harvest anything, even for the small grains, and the rate at which livestock has been dying.”

In the face of extremely challenging conditions, the staff of BIC-CDS and farmers like Dube and Magwala are doing what they can.

Despite growing conditions that are far from ideal, they can still conduct trainings for other farmers and experiment with different ways of laying out their own crops and implementing these techniques.

And there have even been some benefits when it comes to introducing new practices. At first, Magwala says, encouraging others to try the new techniques was a big challenge.

Now, with the high costs of climate change and drought, they’re more interested.

And, in the fields of Magwala, Dube and others, they’re seeing what conservation agriculture can bring.

“There was a time where it only rained thrice,” Magwala says. “Those with CA, they got something. Those without CA, they never got something.” ■

*Annalee Giesbrecht is advocacy engagement animator and coordinator for the Peace & Justice Office of MCC Canada.*



**Infiltration pits like this one collect and hold rainwater, which then seeps out sideways to nourish nearby plants.**





Photo courtesy of Andrew Bauman

Andrew Bauman (right side, in back) and infant daughter Lydia Bauman join SALT and YAMEN participants for a meal prepared by YAMEN participant Mathias Wiebe (right side, in front).

## Connecting people in Bolivia

**Name:** Andrew Bauman

**Hometown:** Vancouver, British Columbia (Grandview Church)

**Assignment:** I am the connecting peoples coordinator for MCC Bolivia. My responsibilities include supervising Serving and Learning Together (SALT) and Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) participants serving in Bolivia for a year, as well as recruiting and sending Bolivian and Paraguayan International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) and YAMEN participants to other countries.

**Typical day:** My workday starts with a 30-second commute from my home on the MCC property in Santa Cruz, where I live with my wife, Anika, and our daughter, Lydia. In the office, you can find me processing YAMEN/SALT/IVEP applications, doing interviews and

applying for visas for incoming participants. I also visit MCC partners and host families and check in with SALTERs and YAMENers.

**Joys:** Being able to walk alongside young adults through one of the most challenging and transformative experiences of their lives. It is really satisfying to see all the ways they have grown at the end of their year of service: the relationships they have formed, their increased cross-cultural awareness and, often, their new Spanish abilities.

**Challenge:** Santa Cruz is Bolivia's largest city, located in the tropical lowlands. Being from Vancouver, and a nature lover, the extreme heat and lack of easy access to nature is challenging. I am grateful to have found some beautiful places where our family can recharge and escape the heat a few hours away in the mountains.

**"It is really satisfying to see all the ways they have grown at the end of their year of service."**

### FIND YOUR PLACE

MCC has workers in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as in Canada and in the U.S.

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

MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to Christian faith, active church membership and biblical peacemaking.

# hello THE JOY OF SCHOOL SUPPLIES

**Around the world, many children wonder: How will I get the school supplies I need?** Often families, especially in areas affected by war, cannot afford simple school supplies. MCC school kits provide notebooks, pencils and more, packed into a cloth bag that can be used as a backpack long after the supplies are used up.

### Did you know?

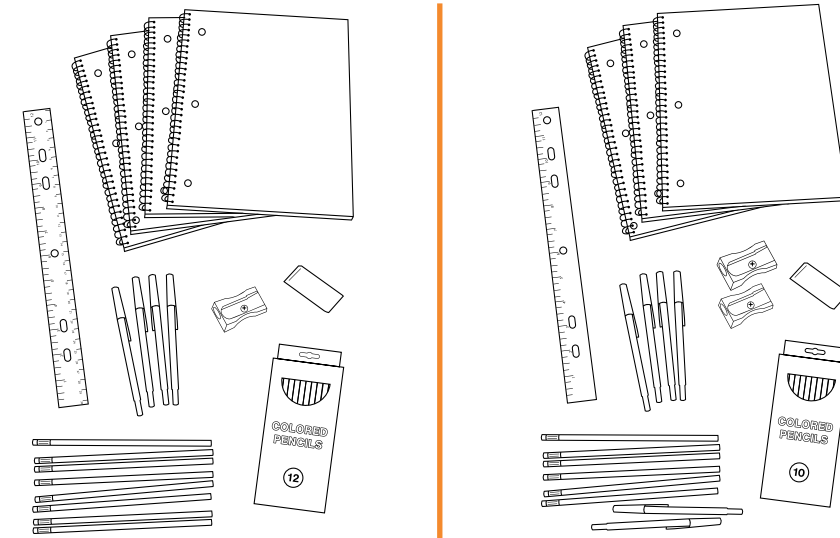
MCC has a goal of collecting **25,000** school kits in **2025** through the School Kit Challenge.

### Spot the differences

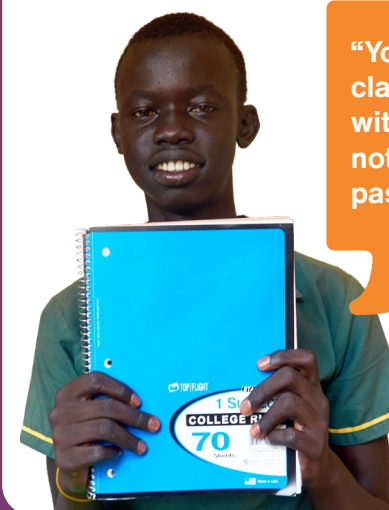
To make things fair, we pack the same items in every school kit, down to the number of pencils.

The picture on the left has everything needed. But in the picture on the right, a few things have changed.

Can you spot the five differences?



### Let's hear from students who have received MCC school kits.



**"You cannot be in the class without supplies, without having a notebook. You will not pass any class without it."**

- John Gai Mabor, 17, lives in Rumbek, South Sudan



**"Without the donations, our families would have had to borrow money to buy supplies for us."**

- Kalkidan Fistum, 13, lives in Tigray, Ethiopia







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[mcc.org/equip-churches](http://mcc.org/equip-churches)

