

Food for body and soul in Ukraine | Clean water in India | MCC's earthquake response in Afghanistan



A Common Place



Cover photo: Valentina, in light blue shirt, chats with friends before lunch in Nikopol, Ukraine. Last name not used for security reasons. (New Life Charitable Fund/Pavlo)

A Common Place

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‘Keep on keeping on’

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

(John 16:33, NIV)

Growing up in Ohio, I heard this phrase nearly every Sunday from the pastor at our small congregation: “And let us keep on keeping on.”

It did not make sense to me then. Now, in my seventh decade, I understand.

While its origin is not known, the phrase was popularized through a 1956 Martin Luther King Jr. speech: “You don’t get to the Promised Land without going through the Wilderness... but if you keep on keeping on, you can’t help but reach it...”

This issue is about keeping on, no matter the difficulty. In these pages, MCC staff and partners show us how.

In Ukraine, Maxym and Anya keep on following where God leads. Izabella and Natalia offer food and companionship, both deeply needed.

MCC was working to bring clean water and toilets to families 50 years ago. I’ve visited tea farms in India more recently, and it is hard to see that this need persists today. Imagine the profound change MCC staff, like Madhur Lakra, see as they keep working to share these essential resources.

Visiting Jacob Yoder in the Democratic Republic of the Congo several years ago, I wondered how he kept going in the midst of horrific stories of violence and loss. As he shares here, “It is often in the navigation of challenges that we put our mission into action.”

Several months ago, I attended the memorial service for a dear friend. Pauline Zehr Myers, in the last years of her life, sewed at least 10,000 school kit bags and countless colorful comforters. When she could not sleep, she would just get up and sew.

Can what keeps these brothers and sisters keeping on be true for each of us? Jesus told his disciples that while we would have trouble in the world, we should take heart.

I am so grateful for these giants of faith who show me the way.

Ann

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

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Young adult service A return to the garden

Three years ago, Andre McKennie’s church in Chicago received a grant to grow fresh produce for its food bank. McKennie, then a high schooler, encouraged leaders to grow plants indoors, year-round, using aeroponic garden towers. Through MCC Summer Service in 2025, McKennie, a college student in Vermont, returned to serve with his church, which now has 14 towers that produce a variety of vegetables and fruits in the church basement. He worked with a team of seven other young adults, from ninth-graders to first-year college students, on the garden project but also in nurturing their spiritual growth. “Lifting other people up and teaching them and building them in the most holy faith was a really amazing opportunity,” he says. Read more at mcc.org/feeding-neighbors.

U.S.

Engaging with global issues

MCC has always had a presence in Bernice Zehr’s life, back to when her family and Sunday school packed Christmas bundles. But, the Lowville, New York, resident says, now that she has retired, she has found new chances to support MCC’s work—and that A Common Place plays a key role. Read more about how sharing stories from the magazine has helped her discuss relief efforts with her church and

encouraged them and her community to respond to needs around the world at mcc.org/sharing-stories.



Honduras Rebuilding dreams

When Mayra Yessenia Burgos López returned to Lima, Honduras, after years of trying to move her family to the U.S., she received a warm welcome from Comisión de Acción Social Menonita (CASM; Mennonite Social Action Commission)—and learned how to support her family by keeping homes cool. As part of a larger effort to connect returned migrants to holistic care and new opportunities, the MCC partner helped her enroll in coursework to become an air conditioner technician.

CASM also provided her with repair tools like a ladder, pressure washer and hose, and her 8-year-old daughter with a scholarship. Burgos López, who thrived in the male-dominated program, says, “My life is proof that...with faith, effort and the help of people and organizations like CASM and MCC, who believe in us, dreams can be rebuilt.”



Zambia Sharing great comfort

Astridah Nyemba, who lives in Zambia’s Meheba Refugee Settlement, recalls that, in winters past, her six children had to share just two blankets. Through MCC partner Brave Heart Foundation, she received three handmade comforters with warm, thick batting.

Sew comforters; cover basic needs

Upon receiving her comforters, Nyemba (pictured above) remarked on their “high quality and beautiful colors.” Will you help craft colorful comforters that will keep a family warm for seasons to come?

We invite you to sew 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, visit mcc.org/comforters. Or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).

Food for body and soul

In vulnerable communities in Ukraine, MCC partners serve up nutritious meals and holistic care.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE

Editor's note: Only first names of Ukrainians are used for their security.

Valentina remembers the day her husband was killed, two years ago, like it just happened. He was tending to the vegetable garden at their house in Nikopol, Ukraine, when they heard the Russian military's artillery fire. It came from the nuclear power plant that the military had commandeered, less than 2 miles from their house.

Shells were commonly launched from there toward Nikopol, a city along the Dnipro River. Already the local reservoir that held the city's drinking water had been destroyed. Houses were blown up, and gas and electrical lines had been hit.

Valentina, 63, screamed toward her husband, "Just lay down. Lay down." Whether it was her warning or he did what all Ukrainians now do instinctively to minimize the chances of being hit by shrapnel or debris, he lay down. Then the next shell fell.

The windows of their house shattered.

Knocked down by the impact, Valentina crawled toward her husband. "You're alive; you're alive," she cried out to him, as if willing it to be true. When she reached him, she saw that he was not.

“It's like coming to your home.”

"It was very hard for me," says Valentina of the months that followed, as she grieved and the shelling continued. "I was crying all the time."

Some acquaintances encouraged her to join them at New Life Charitable Fund, an MCC partner in Nikopol, where she could get food and other supplies. Valentina was reluctant, embarrassed to ask for help.

But eventually she came, taking part in the free, hot lunches New Life offers every weekday. Staff and volunteers listened, embracing her and her grief. She was comforted, too, by their practical help of washing, drying and folding her clothing—just like her mother would have—after they learned her washing machine was broken.

"It's like coming to your home," she says.

The open arms that she and others have found at New Life are sorely needed in this area of eastern Ukraine, where many, like Valentina, live within a few miles of territory controlled by the Russian military.

Since February 2022, a number of residents who have money or connections have fled, seeking safety in other parts of Ukraine or abroad.

Those who remain learn to live with the constant fear of death falling from the sky, of being struck by artillery shelling or targeted by drones.

Many are elderly or have a disability or chronic illness; they struggled to live on fixed incomes before the war even

Valentina works in the garden at her home, where she farmed alongside her husband before he was killed in artillery shelling.



Anna and her son, Sashko, sit with the food they just received through New Life Charitable Fund.

“I don’t need to think, ‘Maybe I will not buy some medicine because I need to buy food.’”

started, says Natalia, director of New Life. Now, rising food costs have outpaced the pensions or stipends they receive from the government.

One recipient, Anna, cares for her disabled father-in-law and her son, Sashko, 6, who has not yet been able to talk. Seeking a diagnosis for Sashko requires seeing multiple specialists and getting medical tests in Dnipro, an upriver city that is a two-hour drive from Nikopol.

Anna’s husband’s salary from a chicken farm and her father-in-law’s pension don’t cover all their existing bills.

So New Life has been paying for Sashko’s medical visits and assigned a social worker to coordinate his care—from keeping track of records and appointments to advocating for the family within the medical system.

The family also benefits from New Life’s food packages, which each contain a three-month supply of locally purchased staples, including grains, flour, beans, oil, vegetables, meat, milk products, tea and more. Out of everything, Sashko likes buckwheat grain cooked with MCC’s “really tasty” canned meat the best, his mother says.

“The help from New Life means a lot to us,” says Anna. “I don’t need to think, ‘Maybe I will not buy some medicine because I need to buy food.’ I can pay all my utilities and stay without debt.”

In Dnipro, MCC’s partner Step with Hope also embraces people who are struggling to cope with the emotional and financial pressures of the war.

That includes offering psychological services for children and adults, whose needs have intensified during the war. Psychologists are prepared to go out to support survivors, day or night, when a missile strikes.

Many families have come there from Ukraine’s easternmost Donbas region, says project manager Izabella. They come with stories of living in basements and being chased or attacked as Russian forces took control of most of the region.

“When people move to a different city, they don’t have much choice where to go, what to do,” Izabella says. That’s one reason why Step with Hope issues monthly food vouchers, valued at about US\$35, to more than 1,000 people.

With her monthly food voucher and help from Step with Hope workers, Hanna buys groceries (bottom photo) and once home, serves tea to the workers who assisted her in the store (top photo).



MCC photo/Alona



MCC photo/Alona

The vouchers, which are funded through MCC's account at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, give people a choice of what food to buy. With that choice comes a sense of feeling special, she says, "a feeling they haven't had for a while."

Although displaced people perceive Dnipro as a safer city with housing and job opportunities, longtime residents of the city also have been traumatized by war.

Hanna, 71, who is a retired nurse and can only walk with crutches, recalls the airport near her house being shelled. "It was very scary. Everything was shaking."

With her family unable to support her, she relies on her monthly pension of US\$104 to pay for her medication, medical expenses, utilities and phone bill. Through Step with Hope's food vouchers, she can eat three meals a day instead of two, she says.

Staff drive her to the grocery store,

where she usually buys flour, sugar and oil with her voucher. While dairy has become expensive, with the voucher she can purchase some nutritious dairy products, like milk and kefir, and divide them into small portions. With the money that remains, she chooses among vegetables, eggs, butter and, rarely, meat.

"This assistance means that I will live to see spring," Hanna says. "Maybe the war will be over by then. Most of all, I'm waiting for my son and grandson to return from the war. I pray that they will be alive and well. I want to live without explosions and fear."

Back at New Life, the hot, three-course lunch draws at least 200 people each weekday.

"This is homemade food. It's filled with good calories," says Valentina. "They also take into account people's health,

"This is homemade food. It's filled with good calories."

Viacheslav (center, in plaid shirt) and other community members enjoy a meal in the dining room at New Life.

Photo courtesy of New Life Charitable Fund



Photo courtesy of New Life Charitable Fund/Pavlo



Valentina stands in the kitchen at New Life with an array of fruits and vegetables she brought from her garden to share with others.

"Good has been done to me, and I want to do good to others."

like dietary needs. People love this food very much."

Although lunch is served from 12 to 3 p.m., many people arrive at the center by 8 a.m.

"People come and they talk," says Natalia, who leads the organization with a heart for physical, emotional and spiritual needs. "They can go away from their own problems and just spend time resting a bit." She offers a Bible-based support group for the most vulnerable women in the community. Psychological care is available, and volunteers lead additional support groups—including one that Valentina attends.

"I just prefer to be among people," Valentina says,

"because just to stay by myself in the house is hard. If I wouldn't have met [the staff], I would still be screaming and suffering in my grief back at home."

She continues to garden at home, refusing to allow weeds and fear to take over, despite the missiles that are still launched nearby. She brings vegetables, fresh and canned, from her garden to New Life to share with others.

"A lot of people are in need," she says, "and I try to support them and to help them. Good has been done to me, and I want to do good to others." ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S.

Give a gift — for the body and soul

In Ukraine and across the globe, your generosity helps families meet basic needs, find new opportunities and draw closer to their neighbors. Will you share hope through helping hands and hot meals? Donate in the enclosed envelope, give online at mcc.org/donate or call MCC U.S. toll free 888.563.4676.

Maxym*

The director of an MCC partner in Ukraine reflects on his journey accompanying youth and families living in the midst of war.

AS TOLD TO DAVID DRIVER



I am the director of New Hope Center, which serves and supports hundreds of families in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, less than 20 miles from the territory controlled by the Russian military.

Most of these families are mothers with children. Many came to Zaporizhzhia after losing or leaving their homes in the war zone. They do not have enough financial support; they do not have social support. They have lots of grief and sorrow. We do our best to serve them as well as local families who are in similar situations.

Mainly we work with the kids to decrease their stress level, to help them cope with the uncertainty. They do not know what is going to happen. We also help parents by providing a safe place, where they feel encouraged, renew their strength and gain hope.

When I see how we helped a mother or child, I am motivated to keep doing what I can, to keep serving.

We have a staff of about 15 now (including psychologists for children and adults).

But when we began in March 2011, it was just the four of us: my wife Anya, myself, and John and Evelyn Wiens, Mennonite Brethren missionaries from British Columbia. They came to Zaporizhzhia to start a church and minister to older orphans. They invited us to join them.

Anya and I had no experience with orphans. These were teenagers who were 16, 17, 18. They had aged out from government orphanages, and we learned how bad it is for them to grow up without parents. We saw so many tragic stories. We really wanted to help them.

Little by little, we began to increase our team. We started a Christian trade school in 2013. Basically, we taught these youth how to live and make a living, things the orphanage did not teach them.

The year 2014 was very difficult. Our leader and champion John passed away suddenly in January. We felt like orphans, personally and professionally. We had lived and worked with John and Evelyn for three years, like Jesus and his disciples.

One or two months after John died, the Russian military invaded and illegally annexed Crimea. We did not know if New Hope would continue.

But God is great. He had plans. I realized things needed to change, and we needed to look for new opportunities.

John and Evelyn had portrayed Jesus to us, being compassionate and helping the needy and the hungry. We knew

we wanted to continue portraying Jesus to others around us in the same way.

Internally displaced people began coming to Zaporizhzhia at this time. All the nongovernmental organizations were helping them, but there were local families that needed help and were underserved.

So, we began working with local families in crisis. Many of our staff completed their studies in psychology. The vision changed, the audience changed, but the mission is still the same: healing the brokenhearted.

We didn't know at the time, but the changes we made at New Hope to serve families helped prepare us for when the full-fledged invasion began in 2022, and many displaced families began coming to us for help.

Early on, as the invasion escalated, Anya and I were home in Zaporizhzhia when a missile landed about 300 feet away. A building was hit and people died. We saw it on the news. So, we decided to move to our country home on the edge of the city. It has a garden. It helps a lot to work in the garden. It is healing.

Where we live, we know they are not attacking us. Most of the bad stuff

flies over us. But as soon as you hear a sound...your body reacts. Some nights are sleepless since missile attacks usually happen at night. It is the new reality.

Some of our New Hope team left for other countries or western Ukraine for safety reasons when the full-fledged war started. Most have now returned, saying, "We want to be home and continue working with you."

They believed that God would keep them safe. They believed God would provide means to help and serve others in Zaporizhzhia. And he did.

As we work in these circumstances, we all need to be renewed—emotionally, physically, even spiritually. When Anya and I, or the whole team, can get some time off work and go to a safer place, like the western part of Ukraine, it helps to renew our strength to come back and keep serving.

I ask people who read this to pray for the war to end. That is number one. Pray for just peace for Ukraine. Pray that Zaporizhzhia stays in Ukraine and is not occupied. We want to continue living here.

Is it dangerous? Yes. Is it hard? Yes. But this is our land. This is where I was born. This is where we have our lives. ■

“I ask people who read this to pray for the war to end. That is number one. Pray for just peace for Ukraine.”

*Maxym is director of MCC partner New Hope Center in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. *Full name not used for security reasons.*



Top: Minati Kerketta helps her son, Manab Oraon, drink a cup of clean water.

Bottom: Jasinta Bhengra of Little Flock Fellowship, at far right, discusses water, sanitation and hygiene with a group in Kohinoor Tea Garden.



Feature
story

Well-versed in wellness

In India, MCC partners build healthy communities with creative outreach and the construction of wells and latrines.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK
PHOTOS BY SANJIB KHAN

Without clean water, “Many parts of life suffer,” shares Sanjay Minj, who lives and works growing tea in West Bengal’s Kohinoor Tea Garden. Minj recalls that when the family was relying on unclean water, he, his wife or their son would fall too ill to attend work or school. “Many people in my family often got sick—some with fevers, others with stomach pain.”

These bouts of illness, common in families who don’t have clean water, interrupt learning for students, lead to a loss of wages for adults and perpetuate the cycle of poverty among rural families, says Madhur Lakra, a project officer with MCC.

Traditionally, Lakra says, “Most of their income went to basic needs, so building toilets wasn’t afford-

able, and safe water wasn’t always available.”

Today, in Kohinoor Tea Garden, Lakra and his team work with MCC partner Little Flock Fellowship (LFF)—an extension of the Anabaptist-affiliated United Missionary Church—to ensure that families can know the peace of mind that clean water brings.

The northern, hilly reaches of West Bengal comprise one of the largest tea-producing regions in the world. When local tea gardens—sprawling plantations—were established, basic plumbing infrastructure was installed by tea companies, who then owned the land and provided basic on-site housing for laborers. But the tea industry has declined. While it is now easier for workers, who grow, pick and process tea, to own and manage plots of land within the gardens, the cost of building or maintaining plumbing systems has outpaced wages.

In recent years, the government has started to build pipes in tea gardens and communities across the state, but this plan is not yet complete. In the meantime, residents living with outdated or half-built water systems



struggle with waterborne illness.

In many communities, there is only a tube well or open pit that provides water for cooking, bathing and drinking. These types of wells draw from shallow groundwater, which is prone to contamination from industrial and household waste. When rain is low, such wells can run dry.

And in rural communities where latrines were once prohibitively expensive, open defecation has long been the norm. This practice not only spreads disease when waste runs into water sources, but leaves people vulnerable to a range of risks, such as slipping and falling or being injured by elephants, snakes, leopards or other wild animals. In the past, many communities have faced issues with deforestation. While logging activities have largely ceased, the loss of larger trees has made it harder to find privacy, especially for women and children.

Minati Kerketta, who lives and works in Kohinoor Tea Garden while her husband migrates for wage labor, knew these risks well. “We badly needed a toilet,” she says. “But our family was facing financial hardship. Even though we tried, we couldn’t afford to build one.”

Kerketta knew of the benefits that clean water and a functioning restroom would bring. But

“We badly needed a toilet... Even though we tried, we couldn’t afford one.”



Madhur Lakra, MCC project officer, leads a group of children in Ruhimari village in a song that promotes healthy practices.

many families, who have gone without these amenities for so long, did not immediately recognize how practices like open defecation, improper handwashing and drinking contaminated water could spread illness.

LFF staff travel to local schools for interactive lessons, and host hands-on activities, like testing for harmful microbes that can live even in the clearest-looking water, for adults.

In Ruhimari and other villages farther south in West Bengal, another MCC partner, Economic Rural Development Society (ERDS), is working to raise awareness of the benefits of resources like latrines by engaging families with lively songs, featuring lyrics written by team members in local languages. The songs come from folk traditions like kobi gaan, a vocal duel between two singer-poets, which has been popular in rural West Bengal since the 19th century.

And while these songs are duels of sorts, when pairs of kobiaals appear in town squares to raise awareness on how important clean water is to public health, attendees come away with a clear message of unity: Everyone deserves a healthy life; let’s work together to make it happen.

“These campaigns were not just formal meetings,” says Monika Tudu, who lives in Ruhimari village with her husband and their 2-year-old daughter. “They included folk-based approaches like gambhira songs (which typically accompany traditional dances), kobi gaan and engaging group discussions that helped us understand critical health and hygiene issues in an enjoyable way.”

“My health has improved, and I am happy being a mother.”

From there, each organization has worked to help build the facilities that families need to turn that awareness into change.

In Ruhimari, ERDS built a community borehole, able to draw water from deeper underground, where there are fewer contaminants. A submersible pump protects the water as it rises to the surface.

Having this clean, safe water has put Tudu at ease as she raises a young child. “Today, my life has changed significantly. My health has improved, and I am happy being a mother. I got this information at the very right time.”

In Kohinoor Tea Garden, LFF helped families obtain portable water filters, which use terra cotta coils to capture bacteria and other contaminants before they reach the tap.

“After we started drinking filtered water, we noticed we weren’t getting sick as often,” says Minj. “We realized that unsafe water had been making us sick.” The organization also helped the family install a latrine at their home.

Kerketta likewise received a water filter and latrine from LFF. These resources have proven invaluable in keeping her growing family safe. “When I became pregnant...I was able to stay healthy, and I safely gave birth to a healthy child,” shares Kerketta. She is grateful for the safety and assurance she now feels at home.

“On behalf of our whole family, I thank Little Flock Fellowship and MCC for giving us a toilet,” she says.

“It is such a good advantage for our daily life.” ■

Page 14: At left, Alexa Chick Baraik, 5, enjoys filtered water in Kohinoor Tea Garden. At right, Sanjay Minj, his wife, Lalita Minj, and son Ansh Minj stand by the latrine they received from LFF.

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Sanjib Khan is a freelance photographer based in Kolkata, India.



Feature
story

A large number of families have been displaced within eastern Afghanistan after an August 2025 earthquake destroyed thousands of homes.

A best-fit response

An MCC partner in Afghanistan helps families meet basic needs after a devastating earthquake.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK
PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARTNER

Editor's note: Names of people and partners in Afghanistan are not used for security reasons.

As midnight approached on Aug. 31, 2025, families in the highlands of eastern Afghanistan awoke to loud blasts and the sensation of heavy shaking. Roofs and boulders from nearby mountains fell, leaving people and livestock trapped in the rubble. According to United Nations estimates, approximately 2,000 people were killed, and thousands more injured, when the magnitude 6 earthquake struck. More than 8,500 homes were destroyed, with many

families taking temporary shelter in tents set up for displaced people. The loss of loved ones, combined with aftershocks that continued to pulse beneath their feet, left people in a state of fear and uncertainty. "It shook heavily, and my house was destroyed," shares a 35-year-old mother (pictured at right), who is living in a tent with relatives. "A big rock rolled from the mountain, fell on my husband, and killed him. My two daughters were injured. We felt that it is the end of the world, and our lives are finished." By Sept. 10, staff from an MCC partner were on the ground in Kunar and Nangarhar, two of the hardest-hit



A man stands at his destroyed home (top left) and men wait at a cash distribution site (top right). Below, a 35-year-old mother signs for a cash distribution with her thumbprint.

Read more at mcc.org/afghanistan-update.



provinces, close to the epicenter. Staff visited displaced families at their temporary homes, sat in circles with them and asked about their needs. Not long after, the partner established a cash distribution site in Nangarhar Province, where 209 families (over 1,400 people) were able to receive funds to help cover the cost

"We really needed cash so that we can buy the things which are important for our life."

of essential items. By distributing cash, rather than coming in with specific resources, partner staff could ensure that those who had just lost everything could decide what they needed the most—something that varied between families. During a follow-up visit, staff dis-

covered that over 80% of families had used some of the cash to replace clothing lost in the earthquake. The partner organization's executive director explains that distributing cash is especially important when people need clothes. "We cannot tell what size is required for each of them," he explains, so it's important that families choose items themselves. Many families also bought medicine and cooking utensils, and sometimes food to supplement what had been shared by other organizations. In determining which of the displaced families would receive cash, the partner prioritized women-led households, the elderly and people with disabilities, helping to ensure that some of the most vulnerable families could meet their basic needs. The 35-year-old mother was among those who lined up to receive a cash distribution on Sept. 17. She says that the funding will be invaluable to her family. "We really needed cash so that we can buy the things which are important for our life." ■

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Photos are courtesy of the partner organization featured in this story.



“It’s often in the navigation of challenges that we put our mission into action.”
JACOB YODER

Jacob Yoder, standing at left, and Fidel Kyanza, of Église du Christ au Congo – Ministère des Réfugiés et des Urgences (Church of Christ in Congo – Ministry of Refugees and Emergencies), speak to people at a distribution in Kibumba, North Kivu province.

Serving in DR Congo

Name: Jacob Yoder

Hometown: Parnell, Iowa (West Union Mennonite Church)

Assignment: As MCC representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), I lead staff and partners in over 20 projects that serve communities displaced by war, violence and disaster. I am based in Goma.

Typical day: No day looks the same. In the morning, I often review proposals, reports or security updates from the night before. In the afternoon, you may find me at the United Nations coordination office for meetings or at the MCC office, checking in with staff.

It’s a large country with limited infrastructure. Even trips to meet with partners within Eastern DR Congo can take several days. We may need to drive across the border into Rwanda, weaving around hills and through mountain

passes before driving back into DR Congo’s Rusizi Plain—a 10-hour trip. The next day, we may continue by boat on Lake Tanganyika for six hours, then travel the following day by motor taxi into communities. They are not easy trips, but always life-giving.

Joys: My colleagues inspire me with their professionalism, spirit of service and laughter, despite unimaginable pressures. I witness the smiles and dancing of grandmothers, who remind me of my own, when they receive cash or food after crisis hits. It also brings me joy to explore some of the most profoundly beautiful corners of this earth, from vast rainforests to bountiful lakes.

Challenges: In five years, the MCC team, as well as family members, have been displaced twice. Goma is just south of a string of volcanoes, and the first time was when Nyiragongo erupted in 2021. More recently, we were displaced

by war, which ultimately resulted in the capture of Goma by a group called M23 in January 2025. Today, they have set up their own government in Goma, where we continue to live and operate. A lot of time and planning goes into mitigating risk and supporting partners and staff, while positioning ourselves to serve the most vulnerable. This is a challenge, but it is also the reason for our work. It’s often in the navigation of challenges that we put our mission into action. **Read more at mcc.org/serving-DR-Congo.**

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 or linkedin.com/company/mccpeace or contact your nearest MCC office to find MCC service opportunities.

MCC photo/Elijah Muweza

for children
hello

UKRAINE

How can you greet someone in Ukrainian?

Pryvit

(Say “pree veet”)



My name is Alina.*

Age: 11

Lives in: Nikopol, Ukraine

I live with my grandmother, my aunt and uncle, two brothers and my mom. I help my mom by cleaning up the house. My mom cooks, but sometimes we go to New Life Charitable Fund (an MCC partner organization) for a hot lunch.

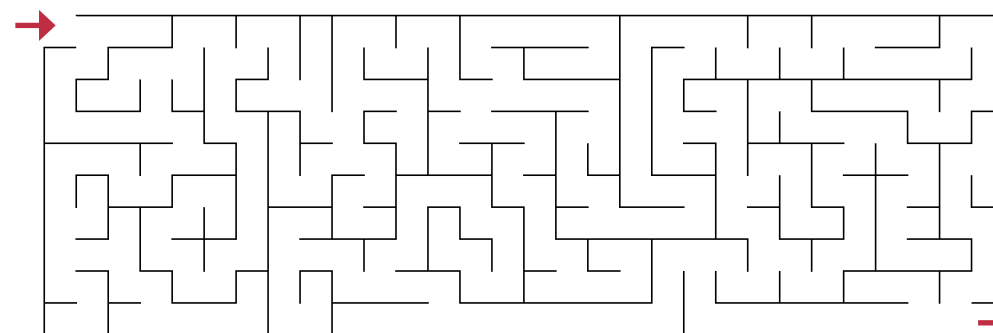
I go to school online and in person, but I prefer studying at home. Before the war, my teacher taught dance at school. I like watching popular dance videos. When the war ends, I will take up dancing.

When I think about the war, I worry that a shell (a bomb) will hit our house or nearby. But I have fun, too, when I spend time with my friends. I am happy when I play with my younger brother Timur — especially when he laughs and smiles.

My favorite food: corn porridge with meat cutlets

My favorite subject: drawing

What I want to be: chef



Can you follow the maze?

MCC’s mobile cannery travels around the U.S. to different volunteer groups. The meat they help prepare is sent to places like Ukraine, where it’s cooked into hot meals for families like Alina’s. **Follow this maze from the mobile cannery to a table at New Life!**

**Last name not used for security reasons.*





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Your gifts to MCC — through qualified charitable distributions, a donor-advised fund or your will — can plant seeds of hope now and help families reap the joy of new opportunities for years to come.

Explore ways to make an impact today and leave a lasting legacy at mcc.org/planned-giving.