In the midst of crisis in Ukraine | Earthquake, war, fire and flood: MCC and disaster response
I am so grateful for your support of MCC that makes all of this work possible. Together, we are showing that we believe Jesus’ words that when we feed the hungry and clothe the naked, we are feeding Jesus’ love to others. And with your support, MCC’s work continues to respond to disasters and crises.

And MCC’s love-fed work is not restricted to responding to disasters. Since MCC’s beginning, our disaster relief, sustainable development and peacebuilding work have been intertwined, assisting thousands and thousands of people, regardless of their faith or cultural background.

The political context in my country suggests that we should take care of our own needs first. The work you support through MCC tells a different story. Together, we are showing in the name of Christ to make a difference in the worst of times. Explore how MCC continues to respond to disasters and crises.

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Cambodia
Breakfast for students
In Cambodia’s rural Prey Veng province, an MCC-supported breakfast program improves nutrition, school attendance and concentration in the classroom. At Poom Primary School, teacher and breakfast cook Oun Pauly dishes out hot, nutritionally dense servings of traditional Cambodian porridge, full of rice, pork and vegetables, to second- and third-grade students.

Lebanon
Thrift shop inspiration
A visit to an MCC Thrift shop was just a day trip for the international partners MCC sponsored to attend the 2015 Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. But Tarek Chehli took the idea back to Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley. Today, the area’s first thrift shop, stocked with low-cost clothing and other items, harnesses the power of community donations to help Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese families.

Chad
Improved fuel and stoves
In Chad, traditional cooking stoves like this lose heat quickly, requiring large amounts of wood charcoal, which is now banned because of deforestation. An MCC partner, Enterprise for Vocational Development, trains community teams to turn rice straw into cooking charcoal, which heats more efficiently and emits less smoke and odor. Teams are also being trained to construct new stoves, which are sturdier and healthier to use because they help contain smoke while cooking. Team members then earn income from selling the charcoal and stoves.

Haiti
Saving seeds

In Kabay, Haiti, MCC worked with farmers to form a community-owned seed bank, giving Jenius Lena and husband Louine Jywasian a safe, dry place to store seeds from last year’s harvest. Before, farmers would risk losing seeds stored at home to pests and mold, or would sell crops when prices were low after harvest and later pay peak prices for seeds to plant.

Lend a hand—Relief kits

Relief kits provide needed supplies for a family of four and are given to families whose lives have been disrupted by disaster or crisis.

Contents

NEW items only, in original packaging

4 large bar bath soap
1 plastic bottle shampoo (13-24 oz; place in resealable plastic bag)
4 large bars laundry soap (Some stores carry Fels Naptha®, Sunlight® or Zote® brands)
4 adult-size toothbrushes
4 new bath towels (medium weight, dark or bright colors)
2 wide-tooth combs (6-8 in)
1 fingernail clipper (good quality)
1 box adhesive bandages (minimum 40 count, assorted)
1 package sanitary pads (18-24 count thin maxi)

Place contents in a box or bag and deliver to an MCC drop-off location. The kit will be repackaged in a new 6-gallon plastic pail with lid. Go to mcc.org/kits or call your nearest MCC office (see page 2) to find drop-off locations.
In the midst of crisis in Ukraine

MCC and its partners are providing comforts, canned meat, rent and other assistance to people who have fled conflict in eastern Ukraine.

STORY BY JULIE BELL
PHOTOS BY COLIN VANDENBERG

When the shooting escalates — usually between late afternoon and the early hours of the next morning — the people flee. They leave behind homes, jobs and often family members.

For much of the world, the conflict in eastern Ukraine seems to be forgotten, says Vadym Proshak, the project manager at MCC partner Zaporizhzhia Baptist Union. But although ceasefires and a peace accord have been announced in the past few years, armed groups are still firing back and forth. “It’s a war and it’s still going on. No one cares about the civilians,” Proshak says. “After another round of shooting, more families come here.”

The conflict began in early 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea in southern Ukraine. Unrest spread, intensifying from May through November 2014 as waves of people fled fighting in the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts (provinces), which share a border with Russia. And people continue to flee. “The artillery broke our roof and windows and luckily I was in the basement. If I had been upstairs I would not be alive,” says Maryana Lagoda, who left Donetsk in January 2016 and now lives in Zaporizhzhia with her 8-month-old son Sasha.

The city of Zaporizhzhia is about 125 miles from the conflict zone. To reach safety, people pass through multiple checkpoints and territory with landmines. Once there, many rely on MCC partners for assistance.

MCC relief kits offer hygiene supplies. Canned meat, which Lagoda receives through MCC partner Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine, provides valuable protein and nutrition. MCC comforters offer warmth in an area where heating is always an issue. And MCC helps people to pay for rent and heat.
Alla Lisitsina, 67, and two other displaced women share this room in a dormitory that served as housing for workers during the Soviet era. In July 2014, she fled from Donetsk. Through Zaporizhzhia Baptist Union, MCC has helped her pay for rent and medication and provided her with comforters and canned meat. “Thank you,” she says. “Thank you for your help and support.”

Lena Skachkova, frightened by the sounds of bombs falling just a few miles away, fled from her home in Lugansk with her sons, 8-year-old Kirill and 14-year-old Slavik, in summer 2014. They live in Nikopol, Ukraine, while her husband remains in the conflict zone to care for his elderly parents.

Before the conflict, most of MCC’s resources in Ukraine were dedicated to helping those who cannot support themselves or find enough assistance from the government—people who are disabled and elderly, former prisoners, single-parent families, people with addictions, those living with HIV and AIDS.

Needs remain strong among those who are not displaced but simply trying to make ends meet in places like Zaporizhzhia or Zhytomyr. For the past 25 years, Yana Gonchar, 79, has cared for her son Viktor Gonchar, a 53-year-old who is confined to bed after injuring his spine when he fell off a roof while repairing a balcony. The Gonchars, who live in Zhytomyr, have combined monthly pension income of about $88, not nearly enough to pay for food, rent and Viktor’s medical supplies. “I don’t even want to think about what will happen to me when my mother passes away,” Viktor says.

In response to situations like this, MCC for years has shipped supplies to Ukraine, helping Care and Mercy Regional Charity Fund and other partner organizations provide canned meat, comforters and hygiene items to people like the Gonchars.

Now, as MCC partners expand their efforts to help displaced people as well, MCC has increased its support. MCC shipments of supplies to Ukraine have nearly doubled since the conflict began in 2014. In addition, MCC has provided $1.3 million, including $738,000 from the Canadian government, in emergency funds. This assistance helps subsidize the costs of heat and rent and funds psychological support, trauma healing and to buy things they need urgently like medication.

Sixty-seven-year-old Alla Lisitsina was forced from her home in Donetsk on July 29, 2014, when civic officials announced an evacuation. With only her personal documents and summer clothes, she joined the flood of people at the train station headed for Zaporizhzhia. When she arrived, Lisitsina found housing in a dormitory, which during the Soviet era was housing for workers.

She is still there. She shares a room with two other women; there are two bathrooms and two stoves for about 30 displaced people.

“I talk to my relatives and they tell me they still hear the shooting,” she says. “They are used to it now, but I cannot do that. At least here it is safe and I have a roof over my head.”

Through its partnership with Zaporizhzhia Baptist Union, MCC has helped Lisitsina pay for rent and medication and provided her with comforters and canned meat. “Thank you,” she says. “Thank you for your help and support.”

Lena Skachkova remembers the air raid sirens in the summer of 2014 and warnings to take food, water and documents into the basement of her home in Lugansk. Just seven miles away, bombs were falling.

“The aircraft were so close overhead and we could hear the bombs,” she says. “I was scared for my children. I didn’t want them to see that.”

Skachkova and her two sons took a train to the safety of Nikopol, as her husband remained in Lugansk to care for his elderly parents. She left behind her job and a newly renovated home. Now, her monthly income, which comes from government support for her sons and a few dollars a day working in a store, totals about $100. In the winter, that’s barely enough to cover heating costs in the apartment she rents.

“We have our ups and downs, and it all piles up inside of you,” Skachkova says. “But I understand why I cannot go home. I cannot risk the lives of my children.”

MCC’s partner organization in Nikopol, New Life Charitable Fund, assists the family with canned meat, comforters and money for utilities and medication. “We make porridge with the canned meat and we use the blankets,” she says. “We have one blanket over the window to keep out the cold.”

The United Nations estimates at least 1.8 million people are displaced within Ukraine by the conflict. They join thousands of other vulnerable people who, in the midst of economic downturn, found their meager pensions and income couldn’t cover the rising cost of living.
Give a gift—Where needed most

Your gift meets urgent needs around the world. It brings new opportunities to families and supports courageous efforts for peace and justice. Send contributions in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

Maryana Lagoda, shown with her 8-month-old son Sasha, fled from the Donetsk area in January 2016 and now lives in Zaporizhzhia. She received MCC canned meat and other assistance from MCC partner Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine.

MCC relief kits, including this one which MCC partner Care and Mercy Regional Charity Fund is distributing in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, provide needed hygiene supplies like towels, soap and shampoo and are often given to people uprooted by disaster or conflict. Want to make your own MCC relief kit? See instructions on page 2.

Viktor Radzyuk, a volunteer for MCC partner Care and Mercy Regional Charity Fund, prepares MCC comforters at a distribution center in Zhytomyr, Ukraine.

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A Ukrainian shares his journey of being displaced and starting to live out his faith by helping others.

AS TOLD TO JULIE BELL

Andriy Chaus

I remember the day that everything changed. It was May 9, 2014. I was in the market and heard shooting. It was at the police building, about three miles away. Scary and terrible things were going on there, right in the middle of Mariupol. People were running in all directions. I had a panic attack for the first time in my life.

I wasn’t there when the building was burned, but I watched it online. It all started as a demonstration and then escalated — there were many armed people shooting into the building. It seems as if they came from nowhere; they supported setting up a Russian territory in Ukraine. The building caught on fire and people died in that building and in the fighting.

The next day, May 10, my family took a bus to Nikopol. We were lucky to get out; the trains were overloaded and people were panic- ing. Later, a bridge that was part of the route out of Mariupol was blown up. At the time, my parents and one of my sisters had an apartment in Nikopol. Our plan was to stay there for a few weeks, until the situation in Mariupol stabilized.

That's not the way it turned out. My wife's parents were still in Mariupol and they told us about the explosions and other dangers. By September most of that part of our family had left. They had a summer house outside Cherkasy village, in central Ukraine. We decided to go there for one week. We stayed for six months, and that was the beginning of the turning point in my life.

The crisis made me ask questions. I felt as if my foundation, everything I had, had been crushed. In the village, a pastor who had arrived at the same time as me came to visit. I started to talk to him, to pray and think about what had happened. In Mariupol I had a nice Christian life with no challenges. But I also had no involvement in being useful to other Christians. I knew that God wanted changes in my life.

Spring came and we returned to Nikopol, to our own apartment where we still live. Money was a sensitive issue. We had used all of our savings in the village and I hadn't yet found a job. I checked websites, sent out resumes, did some interviews. It was as if God had closed all doors, maybe so I wouldn’t be able to lose myself in the comfort of work.

At church here in Nikopol someone said, why don’t you go to New Life Charitable Fund and ask for help? This was hard, because of my pride. Before this, I had judged people who asked for help. I thought if people had bad times it was their own fault, their choice.

But I had tried to be self-sufficient and take care of my family and I couldn’t do it by myself. Finally it reached a point where we had to ask for help. New Life gave us food packages, blankets, canned meat, hygiene kits, towels — things provided to New Life by MCC. New Life did this with care and love. We could touch the love in the things they gave us. This love fed us. It wasn’t just words.

That was in April of 2015. The next month I started as a volunteer with New Life. In June, I began working there as an employee.

When I first started working with former prisoners, addicts and the homeless who came to New Life for help, I realized I had an aversion to these people. I didn’t want to touch them. Little by little, my thoughts changed and the stereotypes faded. I came to see that every person deserves respect and sometimes people find themselves in difficult times because of circumstances — like my case, what happened in Mariupol was not my fault.

People may need support to help them stand up again. Then you can see the change — not 100 percent of the time, but without that support there’s no chance for change.

In January 2017, I decided to move on from my job at New Life. My next work will be where God leads. I am spending time in prayer to ask for God’s guidance, while I continue to try to help youth and others live healthier lives.

I still think about that village and the pastor who was there when I needed help. And I am thankful for what I have lived through. I don’t know how else I would have learned these things.

Earthquake, war, fire and flood: MCC and disaster response

See how MCC is at work in times of disaster and crisis.

Compiled by Marla Pierson Lester

From its beginning nearly 100 years ago, MCC has worked in the name of Christ to make a difference in the worst of times.

That means meeting needs that are in the headlines and responding to disasters that few people have heard about. It means helping people within days of an earthquake or flood and partnering with communities over the years it takes to recover. It means working with trusted partners to identify immediate needs and determining how MCC can best be part of a community’s efforts to rebuild over time.

As you see how we’re responding to crises today, we invite you to pray for those struggling with loss and for the people, churches and other partners delivering assistance and working alongside communities as they recover.

Some examples of MCC’s disaster response through the years

1920, Russia: The first MCC workers, Orie O. Miller, Clayton Kratz and Arthur Stagel, deliver assistance in Russia, Ukraine and Turkey. Kratz disappeared and was believed killed. Miller and Stagel returned.

1922, Russia, Ukraine: MCC ships 50 tractors to Russia and Ukraine and extends relief work to Mennonite colonies in Siberia in 1923.

1930s-40s, Paraguay: MCC helps resettle thousands of Mennonite refugees in Paraguay and elsewhere in South America, as well as in Canada and the U.S.

1943-48, France: MCC furnishes daily glasses of milk to some 1,000 refugee children in France.

1946, Kansas: MCC’s portable meat canner begins operating in Kansas.

1947, Germany: MCC launches a feeding program in Germany for 5,000 children and 3,000 sick, elderly or disabled people. Much of the food is home canned and donated by people in Canada and the U.S.

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1966, Vietnam: Seven MCC workers are present in the eight-day siege at Hue, Vietnam. MCC workers serve in Vietnam throughout the Vietnam War.

1967, Middle East: MCC distributes clothing and blankets to Palestinian refugees in the East Bank area of Jordan and begins laying foundations for human rights and peace work in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel.

1968, Vietnam: Seven MCC workers are present in the eight-day siege at Hue, Vietnam. MCC workers serve in Vietnam throughout the Vietnam War.

1970-72, East Pakistan/Bangladesh: Response to a 1970 cyclone in East Pakistan is followed by outreach to refugees who fled to India amid war after East Pakistan declares its independence as Bangladesh. Rehabilitation efforts follow.
Responding over months and years:

After earthquakes struck Nepal in April and May 2015, MCC provided immediate assistance, including food and shelter materials. But by December 2015, winter was coming and many people still lacked adequate supplies. A distribution of MCC-funded mattresses, tarpas, blankets, jackets and other materials, Rama Chepang and others from Bhasbhase village in Dhading district hike back up the mountain to their homes.

Matching communities’ priorities: After Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti in fall 2016, MCC, recognizing the well-founded fear of cholera from contaminated wells and water sources, prioritized clean water in its initial and ongoing responses. In the first 24 hours after the storm, MCC provided water purification tablets along with relief kits, blankets and food in Cite Soleil, an impoverished area of Port-au-Prince. “These are such a blessing. These are such a blessing for our community,” Hudson Reny-Jean, holding 3-cent water purification tablets, said as he pointed to a contaminated well. MCC is also providing materials to build latrines in the Artibonite region, about 40 miles north of Port-au-Prince.

Identifying what isn’t available elsewhere: In Nepal, government grants are available to rebuild earthquake-damaged housing. So MCC is working with partners to fund projects that aren’t covered under other efforts, including building toilets and latrines, rebuilding some community buildings and helping families earn income.

Not just disasters that make headlines: In Nepal, in addition to an earthquake response totaling more than $3 million, MCC has in the past year supported at least four other disaster responses for flooding and fires. After a wildfire tore through an earthquake-affected area where people were living in temporary shelters of wood and tin sheets, Mishra Bayalakoti, left, received supplies from MCC worker Juliana Yonzon and Binu Karki of Nepal Christian Relief Services.

“...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35)
Hurricane Matthew in Haiti
Hurricane Matthew in Cuba
Hurricane Otto in Nicaragua (Responses April 2016 – February 2017)
Earthquake in Nepal
Earthquake in Ecuador
Fire in India
Fire in Nepal
Drought in Ethiopia
Drought in Zimbabwe
Drought in El Salvador
Drought in Guatemala
Drought in Bolivia
Flooding in India
Flooding in Nepal
Flooding in Colombia
Flooding in Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Returnees from Central African Republic in Chad
Local conflict in Songhor region, Kenya
Somali refugee crisis in Kenya
Boko Haram violence in Nigeria
Political instability in Burundi
Conflict in South Sudan
Conflict in Sudan
Conflict in Myanmar (Burma)
Conflict in Ukraine
Conflict in Iraq
Conflict in Syria
Bombardment of Gaza
Conflict in Colombia

Meeting a variety of needs: MCC strives to respond to the breadth of needs that a disaster can trigger. In Ethiopia, as drought led to rising food prices and widespread hunger, MCC funded daily, hot meals at an MCC-supported school in the city of Adama, helping students such as Besufekad Mesfen, front, and his classmates.

"I know myself better now and I know that I’m resiliant in the trauma I’m going through," said Dalia Said. And she brings that experience to her work in Aleppo, listening deeply to people’s stories and sharing their pain. As a Muslim working alongside Christians, she also urges youth growing up amid the destruction of war to reach beyond the harms the conflict has caused them and to love those who are different. "Because they have experienced the violence, we don’t want them to grow up and repeat the cycle again," she says. "God created us all to live together in harmony. He created us to give, to build, to help."

Being the church in Syria

MCC support and supplies like relief kits give Syrian partners tangible ways to show love and care to people like this 91-year-old Aleppo woman below—and to be the church, even through shelling and destruction.

"In the midst of suffering, faith does not disappear—it is made stronger for many as they find help within their communities," says Doug Enns. He and his wife Naomi, who are from Winnipeg, Man., served as MCC representatives for Syria and Lebanon through April 2017.

"MCC’s aid helps strengthen the churches to be able to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in their communities during this time of war and loss." The 91-year-old whose name is not used for security reasons—left her home after a missile hit it last summer and now lives alone. Without a regular income, she relies on help from others and appreciates MCC’s relief kit, filled with hygiene supplies.

"At my old home, my brother used to visit me with his family from time to time, as well as my friends. But now, since the city is witnessing a very bad situation, it’s very difficult to live or even to try to go out to buy food or any other things. I depend on my neighbors and good people like you to get my essential and necessary needs; you are my only hope in these difficult days," she told workers from the Middle East Council of Churches.

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Returnees from Central African Republic in Chad
Local conflict in Songhor region, Kenya
Somali refugee crisis in Kenya
Boko Haram violence in Nigeria
Political instability in Burundi
Conflict in South Sudan
Conflict in Sudan
Conflict in Myanmar (Burma)
Conflict in Ukraine
Conflict in Iraq
Conflict in Syria
Bombardment of Gaza
Conflict in Colombia

$41+ million programmed so far in MCC’s Syria and Iraq crisis response

6,000 Syrian families receiving monthly food baskets

2,000 families in Aleppo receiving six months of clean water

"...they think about us and give us something out of love."
MCC representatives

Name: Adam and Sarah Sensamaust (serving with children Anaïs, Sabine and Charlotte)

Hometown: Harrisonburg, Va. (Park View Mennonite Church)

Assignment: As representatives based in Ouagadougou, we oversee MCC’s work in Burkina Faso, communicating with MCC partners and workers from our office and going out to visit projects and people taking part in them.

Typical day: We bike to the MCC office, work in the morning and then return home at lunch for the traditional afternoon repos (French for repose). We eat together as a family, then we go back to work and our daughters play with friends in our neighborhood.

Joys: We get the chance to work with and be friends with some of the greatest people in the world—the Burkinabé (people of Burkina Faso). We are surrounded by Burkinabé who have deep faith—not just that the rainy season will always return to water their crops, but we also see how Muslims and Christians live together in peace and are bonded in respect for each other’s faith.

We’ve grown to look forward to unexpected breaks in our work day when partners stop by for a cup of tea and a chat. We also get great satisfaction in improving our French and watching our girls grow up bilingual.

Challenge: The heat! For part of the year it’s well over 100 degrees and we are very aware of how close we live to the Sahara desert.

Find your place

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

Go to mcc.org/serve, contact your nearest MCC office or follow @servemcc on Twitter to learn about current service opportunities.

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

Tissue paper flowers

Make a spring bouquet using tissue paper and pipe cleaners.

1. Cut 4-5 circles from colored tissue paper and stack them all together.
2. Fold the stack in half, and then in half again.
3. Cut a small notch near the center of the wedge (see drawing).
4. Open the stack back up and weave a pipe cleaner through the two holes.
5. Twist the pipe cleaner into a stem for your flower.
6. Fluff the layers of tissue paper out into the shape of a flower.

My name is Nastya Dontsova

Age: 12

Lives in: Zhytomyr, Ukraine

I used to live in Donetsk, Ukraine, with my mother, father and older sister. But there was fighting and it was too dangerous to stay. My parents and I came to Zhytomyr in October 2014. My sister stayed in Donetsk to study and is still there. My father died a year ago, so it’s just me and my mother living in a room in a hotel. We get help paying rent (through an MCC partner) and also get canned meat and other things. My mom really likes the MCC comforters.

I’m in seventh grade. I take music lessons and play the flute. My mom is a cashier at a food store and sometimes I go see her after school. I make paper flowers and bracelets and sell them for spending money.

During a student visit to a television station, I was asked what I want from the city of the future. I said I want a city where it’s easy to live and learn, but most important, I want a city with no war.

I want to go back to Donetsk. My mom says when it is peaceful there we can go home.

My favorite food: sushi, pizza and salad

My favorite subject: art

What I want to be: journalist

Print more copies ▶▶ mcc.org/hello
Why we give

It's fun and it's nice to know you're impacting the world in a positive way."

When Naomi Martin was 3 years old, she approached her mother with an unusual idea – to hold a coloring recital, sort of like a ballet recital except she would color instead of dance and others could join in. As Naomi talked about using the money to help people in Africa, her mother agreed to give it a try. Today, the coloring recital is an annual event and Naomi, now 12, has raised more than $7,600 for the work of MCC around the world.

At the beginning of a crisis, there might be many hands willing to help.” As other support fades, MCC remains. “It’s not only going for the disaster but going farther when you train somebody to be self-sufficient.”

For the past 20 years, José and Lourdes Rodríguez have donated to MCC. As founding pastors of Esmirna Brethren in Christ Church who have partnered with MCC in Miami, they’ve seen how MCC school kits and other supplies help firsthand. But most of all, they’re struck by MCC’s commitment to work for months or years alongside a community, helping people recover and find new ways to sustain themselves.

I cannot go to Haiti for disaster relief. I can’t teach Sudanese better farming practices. But MCC can and does. We are very grateful for that and are blessed to be supporters.”

Wayne Joosse and his wife Anamarie say that they “have great respect for the Mennonite tradition, though it is not our own... MCC is responding to God’s call with authenticity and effectiveness but needs other disciples to support them prayerfully and financially. That we should give to MCC seems to us to be an easy choice.”

It helps us keep the focus of what Christmas should mean.”

Every Christmas morning, parents Duane and Trish Penner gather their daughters McKinley, Maia and Malea around the computer, deciding which of MCC’s Christmas giving projects they want to support. Giving to MCC at Christmas is a three-generation tradition for the Penners, starting with Duane’s parents Ron and Ruth Penner of Landmark, Man.