Saving babies’ lives, mending relationships | New life after leaving home | Caring and hope for people on the move
“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”
(Romans 15:7 NRSV)

One of the themes of the biblical story is of uprooted people following the call of God or searching for safety and refuge. From Abraham and Sarah to Mary and Joseph, to Paul relating to house churches made up of immigrants, the people of God are on the move.

With the exception of people whose ancestors inhabited the land before current national lines were drawn, those of us in the U.S. reading this issue are here because of migration. Some people came from Europe due to war, economic need or religious persecution. Enslaved people were forced to migrate from Africa. Others came, for a variety of reasons, from all over the world.

This issue shares stories of people on the move and the creative and hope-building ways that they are received and hosted and work together to survive and thrive.

Imagine your church responding, as the South Sudanese Episcopal church does, to people seeking asylum.

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Nepal

Emergency food

The devastating effects of lockdowns and hunger due to COVID-19 continued through months of 2021 in countries like Nepal, where case counts surged and vaccines were not yet widely available. In June 2021, MCC supported partner Shanti Nepal in funding a distribution of emergency food and medical supplies in Dhading district, Nepal.

Resources to explore

MCC podcast

Relief, Development and Podcast is a podcast from MCC. Every episode features a story from the field and a conversation with a special guest. Hear stories about how your support for MCC helps meet basic human needs and work for peace and justice. Find episodes at mcc.org/relief-development-podcast or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Jordan

Kits and comforts

Over the past year, MCC relief kits and other items have made a difference for refugees in cities including Amman and Hruson, Jordan (shown in the photo above). “Here the light of Christ shines through MCC with school kits, hygiene kits and relief kits,” Iraqi refugee Laili Bajaj said during a distribution of MCC items in Ajloun last March. “What colorful comforts that bring joy to the heart and warmth to the bodies of my loved ones,” said Yagmora Shlash, a Syrian refugee and mother of six. Want to help? Go to mcc.org/kits to see how you can provide warmth and comfort and to learn more about this ministry of caring.

Lend a hand—Sewing kits

These kits are often given through MCC-supported programs that teach sewing or tailoring and provide the tools to make and mend clothing or to begin a business.

Contents

3 spools wool thread (all-purpose; cotton/poly or 100% polyester; min. 250 yds.)
3 spools black thread (all-purpose; cotton/poly or 100% polyester; min. 250 yds.)
1 sewing tape measure (plastic or fiberglass; 150 cm; inch markings optional)
1 thimble (metal; medium size)
1 dressmaker shears (good quality)
1 package needles (min. 25; assorted sizes)
1 package straight pins (min. 80; round plastic heads preferred)
Shirt-style buttons (12; black or white; size 5/16 inch; place loose buttons in a resealable plastic bag)
Sew-on snaps (min. 20; assorted sizes)
Safety pins (min. 10; assorted sizes)

MCC help

MCC Central states

171 Southdale St., P.O. Box 325
North Newton, KS 67117
717.856.3137

MCC East Coast

58-4 Howell Street
Philadelphia, PA 19144
717.856.3101

MCC Great Lakes

1200 Oxford Street
Grand Forks, ND 58202
717.856.6130

West Coast MCC

1010 2nd Street
Redding, CA 96004
550.630.6011

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The earth is cracked and dusty beneath the dry season’s scorching sun. Few leaves remain on the lonely trees that dot the arid landscape. Even in normal times, farmers in this region of Burkina Faso must build shaded spaces for their livestock to survive the heat. They need to carefully plan and store food to make it through the long months of this lean time.

Today the pressures of conflict and migration are making the situation more dire. “These have been hard years for our communities,” says Naaba Tissé, a traditional chief in Boussouma, Burkina Faso. Tissé looks over the parched farms and mud brick homesteads scattered across the sunbaked plateau below his home. “The violence from the north has made many people flee, and we have welcomed them into our homes and communities.”

In many villages, he says, displaced people now outnumber locals. “We had challenges before, but now all things … food, water, schools, health care and land, are being divided among more people. It is getting harder for families to get by and even harder to keep peace.”

A civil war in neighboring Mali and armed group activity has spilled into the north and east of Burkina Faso and displaced more than a million people within Burkina Faso. In 2020, the official number of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso nearly doubled, leading the United Nations to identify this as one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world.

Kaya and Boussouma communes (similar to counties) host some of the highest numbers of displaced people within the country in proportion to their population. Here, MCC has been supporting local interfaith partner
Our children rarely get sick or malnourished anymore as they did in the past, and child deaths are very rare now.\(^\text{29}\)

ACCORD was founded in 2010 by three university classmates from Kaya who wanted to find solutions to community problems that could bring people of different religions and ethnicities together. Their first MCC-supported projects were in peace education. However, as the conflict accelerated and the health and nutrition in the area deteriorated, they felt that these urgent needs could not go unaddressed.

The community maternal and child health program began in 2018, adapting a care group model of women’s support groups that MCC had started using in Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia. The project grew rapidly. It now covers 37 villages and reaches 17,003 participants in Burkina Faso, primarily through twice-monthly meetings of 330 mothers’ care groups.

"Many efforts that try to help people end up tearing people apart by creating resentment between host communities and displaced people," notes Aminata Ouedraogo, a community health worker and volunteer leader in the MCC-supported program. "This project has been different. It brought people together to save lives. Our children rarely get sick or malnourished anymore as they did in the past, and child deaths are very rare now."

Infant mortality in the participating communities has plunged by 83% since the project started in 2018, even as the security and economic situation deteriorated. This translates to 26 fewer child deaths per year across these communities.

This decline in child deaths was so significant that the participating health clinics won an award from the Ministry of Health for some of the biggest sustained improvements in infant mortality seen in the country in recent years. These gains were not made by building new clinics or expensive new medical services. Instead, the project focused on supporting mothers, families and communities in maximizing their resources to improve the nutrition and health of mothers and children.

"The impact has been so clear and powerful that it brought the whole community together," says Gregou Sawadogo, a Catholic priest who participated in the program. "Locals and displaced people, Catholics and Protestants, Muslims and Christians, health workers and tradition-
Catholic priest Gregoui Sawadogo

8 A COMMON PLACE

Community health workers and clinics to build trust and among children involved with the program. This led to a stunning 84% reduction in diarrhea while close water can be used for washing dishes and for drinking, even if they had to walk farther for it, not clean.

Mothers were urged to prioritize cleaner water sources and better sanitation and hygiene practices. Mothers were urged to prioritize cleaner water, a danger in an area where water is often scarce. The porridge uses locally available ingredients such as, from left, soybeans, peanuts and millet. The small black balls are local beans partially cooked so they integrate better into the texture of the porridge. Right, properly drying food like this corn is essential for both children and adults.

Mothers learn how to make affordable enriched porridge with local millet, peanuts and beans to get their children through the dry season when nutritious fresh foods are scarce. The porridge uses locally available ingredients that can be grown by families to store up for the lean season.

Fathers were also brought into the project to ensure that they prioritized growing and storing ingredients for the porridge and other high-nutrition foods. Care groups urged mothers to rely on solely breastfeeding for infants under 6 months old. Now, 70% more mothers are giving these infants breastmilk only instead of following traditional practices of supplementing with water, a danger in an area where water is often not clean.

Care groups also promoted the use of improved water sources and better sanitation and hygiene practices. Mothers were urged to prioritize cleaner water for drinking, even if they had to walk farther for it, while close water can be used for washing dishes and hands. This led to a stunning 84% reduction in diarrhea among children involved with the program.

Care groups also connected with government community health workers and clinics to build trust and open access to existing community health services for prenatal, delivery and postnatal care. Project volunteers work alongside faith leaders, community health workers and community leaders to promote new health behaviors. This includes encouraging men in the community to support mothers in making changes and ensuring that scarce household resources are set aside for the medical and nutritional needs of mothers and children.

And, in a region where conflict and hunger are still threats, the groups bring people together. “There was no division among us in this work to help our children,” says Abdoul Nassir Sawadogo, as he fed her daughter, Zounogo, the enriched porridge she learned to make in the program. “There was no ethnic or religious separation, and no difference between displaced and settled people. Every child’s life is treated as equal, and every mother has a place in our group. We are blessed to be together in this.”

This model of community-led maternal and child health is also being used by MCC partners in Somalia, Kenya, Burundi and Nigeria. And the Anabaptist Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia will start incorporating this model into its MCC-supported maternal and child health work in 2022.

“The path to peace starts by including everyone in working together to make a community better,” says Chief Tissé. “This project does not solve the insecurity in the north. It cannot. But this work brings people together with respect.”

“We all eat from the same plate, and there are many more of us at the plate now. When the food is gone, we are hungry together. So if we want peace, we must work together and share our table.”

Paul Shetler Fast, health coordinator for MCC’s work around the world, visited Burkina Faso to help evaluate ACCORD’s maternal and child health program in May and June 2021. Figures cited in this story were accurate at time of writing in fall 2021.

Give a gift – Where needed most
When you give today, you are helping those who have fled from home or are facing disaster or conflict. You are improving the health of mothers and babies like these in Burkina Faso and bringing new opportunities. Donate in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).
New life after leaving home
Within South Sudan and in neighboring countries like Uganda, MCC is helping those who have fled from violence.

BY LINDA ESPENSHADE

War was escalating again in South Sudan in 2016, so 20-year-old Augustine Bidali hopped on a motorcycle taxi to quickly cover the 22 miles to his younger brothers’ boarding school.

He was planning to bring his brothers, ages 13, 11 and 7, home to join their parents, another brother and two sisters. His mother and father, a successful businessman, would figure out how to protect them from there.

But when Bidali neared the school in Central Equatoria State, he was accosted by soldiers, who delayed his journey by three days. By the time Bidali reached Emmanuel Christian Academy, fighting had blocked the road back home.

"The only option was to join the rest of the people in the school to flee in the opposite direction," Bidali says, recounting his story in August 2021.

Opposing armed groups had been fighting for control of the government of South Sudan since 2013, two years after the new country established its independence from Sudan in 2011. Already hundreds of thousands of people had fled to neighboring countries or to safer areas in South Sudan.

Bidali and his family had managed to stay safe for the past three years, but no longer.Bidali had time only to grab two changes of clothes and a sheet from the boarding school. Then the brothers fled with a teacher from Uganda.

They traveled first to a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they couldn’t get help. So they continued, walking back home.

"Throughout the nine days of walking, I and my siblings did not taste any food," Bidali says. "We survived on water from streams and rivers that we crossed on our way, regardless of whether it was clean or not."

Bidali recalls that most people ran through the forest, hoping not to run into any soldiers because they would accuse the civilians of supporting the other side. Many people witnessed brutal murders, rape and looting of their property.

The brothers eventually settled in a United Nations camp in Uganda, where they received basic shelter and food vouchers. In fall 2021, they remained there, still not knowing where their parents or other family were or what had happened to them.

Bidali and his brothers were like droplets in another wave of South Sudanese refugees seeking safety. As of 2021, the UN reported more than 2.3 million refugees, most living in neighboring countries, and 1.7 million people displaced within South Sudan.

They need food, trauma care and job training. So for the past several years, MCC has been supporting its partner organizations in Uganda.

Ethiopia and South Sudan to help meet those needs.

At the same time, a fragile hope is growing that a 2018 peace agreement in South Sudan will hold and refugees will be able to come home. Violence has ceased between the primary warring parties.

Yet of the estimated 360,000 refugees who had returned to South Sudan by 2021, most could not go all the way to their home villages. Some smaller rebel groups that did not sign the peace agreement continue to fight. Bandits, cattle raids and revenge attacks make farming unsafe.

So returnees come as close to home as possible, gathering in informal camps. Yet food and jobs are hard to get, especially as South Sudan’s economy struggles.

Throughout the nine days of walking, I and my siblings did not taste any food."
Augustine Bidali uses his training in tailoring to support his three younger brothers. “Back in South Sudan, our father used to be a businessman,” he recalls. “All the responsibilities of family upkeep rested on our parents, but now I have taken over all these responsibilities …” (Photo courtesy of Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment West Nile)
An educator who fled from Sudan reflects on his journey and his work to help Sudanese students in Egypt.

Compiled by Linda Espenshade

I grew up in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. People lived in simple houses with their parents and extended family. I have 11 brothers and sisters.
The area was beautiful. We were surrounded by many mountains. I had friends in school, and we looked after the cows together. I was exactly 12 years old when we heard people crying and people running. We just ran to the mountains, too, and were hiding in the mountains all day. After some time, we heard the voice of the Antonov helicopters. They were bombing us and the buildings.
It was a tough time. It was unbelievable.
It was difficult to leave, to move from my place to Khartoum (Sudan’s capital city).
After some months, we rented a house. We started to attend Sunday school, and we began school. I attended primary school for eight years and then secondary school.
It was very important for my parents to educate us. We were encouraged to study because we saw what our parents were doing for us.

We teach the Sudanese curriculum. Classes are in Sudanese Arabic (a dialect which is more familiar to the refugee children than Egyptian Arabic).
Many students did not go to school when they were in Sudan and their ages are a problem for fitting into the Egyptian school system.
We can get someone who is like 15 years old but would join grade two or three.
We solve this problem by giving them the basics of education. We are pushing them in some classes. They take tests to see if they can move to the secondary level.

In our community, there are a lot of challenges. There are drugs and drinking and crime. Some families are just really struggling to live. The priority is to pay the rent and then feed the families.
I had a student who was 16. I realized that she was not coming to school, and I called the parents and I asked them what was happening. They told me that they sent their daughter to work. They said we don’t have money or food in the home, so this way we take her from school, just to work. If our situation becomes better, she will be back, they told me.

Some parents wait to educate their children until they are able to go overseas, but we warn them this is a bad idea. It will affect the children. They don’t learn and they don’t have work.

Some parents struggle and struggle very much to educate their children and also to feed them. They are suffering. We ask for your prayers and also awareness and advice to just encourage them.

I also want to just give appreciation to partners and all who are helping the school for just encouraging us. It’s wonderful. It’s a big, big, big help, and I am asking God also to bless you all.

MCC supports St. Raphael Center and the work of Emmanuel Zaid through a partner organization, Refuge Egypt. Refuge Egypt staff member Monica Mehaffey conducted the interview for this article.
In Honduras and Guatemala, MCC partners are helping returning migrants or those seeking asylum to figure out next steps.

REPORTING BY LYNETTE MADRIGAL-GRANADOS AND NATHAN SPIECKER

Caring and hope for people on the move

In Honduras and Guatemala, MCC partners are reaching out to people at various stages of migrating — caring for their needs and helping them to determine what they might do next.

Take Edwin Milian Mejia Cruz, who left Honduras and his rural home in the Department of Yoro because he saw no opportunity for himself. “I’ve taken the migratory route three times now, but most recently I was turned back in Mexico and returned to Honduras in August,” says Cruz.

Now, though, new plans are taking root for him.

Last fall, Cruz was one of more than two dozen returned migrants who participated in an agricultural development program supported by MCC and the Honduran Comisión de Acción Social Menonita (CASM; Menonite Social Action Commission). Through sessions held at a local agricultural institute, he and other returned migrants gained training and knowledge in agriculture. They received tools and fertilizer that they can use to cultivate crops now, along with training to eventually incorporate agroecological techniques that will reduce their use of chemicals.

Project leaders make home visits and work with returning migrants on plans for everything from planting and harvesting to installing irrigation systems and improving coffee farms, helping people find new ways to face the challenge of building a brighter future without leaving home.

This is only one of the many ways that MCC partners, throughout Central America and Mexico, are making a difference for people on the more.

In the bustling of Guatemala City, for instance, MCC partner Casa del Migrante (Migrant House) serves as a place of refuge, shelter and legal assistance for migrants from all backgrounds.

Social workers and a psychologist, as well as attorneys and other staff, help migrants connect to medical, legal and employment resources. Meals and clothing are provided to all, and shelter rooms provide a temporary living space, often for those seeking asylum in Guatemala or waiting to return to their home countries.

Especially for migrants buffeted by harsh turns in their migration journeys, Casa del Migrante provides a safe space of respite.

Take Oscar, a mechanic who fled from Honduras and whose real name isn’t used for security reasons. Facing extortion from local gangs, his shop was burned down, and he was shot and injured as he made his way to the police to file a report. That was in February 2021. A month later, he left Honduras to seek safety in Mexico.

But a migration journey has its own dangers.

After being detained in Mexico, Oscar was held for nearly three weeks and finally released. Then, while staying at a shelter as he sought asylum, he was robbed. Another Honduran responded to the robbery with violence, beating the man who had robbed Oscar. And that wasn’t the worst. Oscar then realized that the Honduran was involved in gangs like those that had threatened him back home. Frightened, he fled.

Eventually caught by immigration authorities again, he was deported across the border to Guatemala. From there, he was homeless for about a month before coming to Casa del Migrante in Guatemala City.

“Here I am recovering, because I arrived beaten up, I was weak, my head hurt,” he recalls. He struggles with the terror of what he experienced in Honduras. He fears being sent back and being found by gang members.

Yet, he expresses gratitude for the quality of care at the shelter and the support he has received. He is requesting asylum, hoping to remain in Guatemala and rebuild his life there. Resources and staff from Casa del Migrante will help guide him through the process.

Like Oscar in Guatemala, Cruz, back home in Honduras, is looking forward to a new start.

In late October, at a graduation ceremony for the agricultural development program, he and others gathered in an outdoor auditorium, cheering for each other as diplomas were passed out. He talked of how useful the trainings had been and how he plans to apply these learnings when he plants corn.

“I hope to be able to have a good harvest this season,” says Cruz. But he also intends that the results of the training and the direction he’s starting on now will last far beyond a single harvest or year.

“I have been given an opportunity to succeed, and I hope that it will bring stability for me and my family,” he says.

In Guatemala, Lynette Madrigal-Granados of Fresno, California, serves with Casa del Migrante through MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program. Nathan Spiecker of Tirana, Albania, is program evaluation and monitoring coordinator for MCC’s work in Honduras and Nicaragua.
MCC project coordinator

Name: Emily Miller
Hometown: Cleveland, Ohio (Forest Hill Presbyterian Church)
Assignment: As coordinator for projects and relationships in northern Mexico, I accompany MCC partners through the monitoring and evaluation process for projects related to migration. My position, based in Ciudad Juárez, is new and part of my role is to identify needs and possible partner agencies in locations along Mexico’s northern border. I also work closely with MCC learning tours focused on migration.

Typical day: Begins with email, communicating with partners and MCC Mexico team members. I work from my home helping partners with funding applications or follow-up information and sometimes travel to visit partners. I also reach out to possible partners to learn more and stay current on migration issues, which change on a daily basis. Some days after work I visit with my neighbors, who have become my extended family.

Joys: Spending time with partners and understanding the context of their location and work. Learning more about different chilis and how to use them in cooking. Being part of the Mennonite Church, Iglesia Anabautista Menonita Nuevo Pacto.

Challenges: Life on the border is continuously changing. U.S. policy changes and court rulings have an immediate effect on the flow of migration and challenge the limited resources of Mexican border communities. Living in and learning a different language is also a challenge.

Reflecting on faith: Micah 6:8 has been an important verse for me in guiding my life. During this service assignment, the song that has resonated with me is, “Here I Am, Lord!” by Dan Schutte. Often, in the midst of the confusion of a new position and service in a new place and space, I have to remind myself to step back and just be present and pray, “Here I am, Lord, now use me as you wish to use me.”

Go to the online version of this story at mcc.org/acommonplace for more information and recipes.

My name is Vera Khaled John.
Age: 11
Lives: On the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt’s capital and largest city
I was born in Sudan’s capital city, Khartoum. I remember that it was hot, which I didn’t like, but I loved the rains there. I moved with my family to Egypt when I was 6 years old. I live with my mother, father, three brothers and a sister.

My parents had friends who sent their children to St. Raphael Center (an MCC-supported school for Sudanese refugees), so I started coming. Going to school is my favorite part of the week. I like to learn. I speak the language of my tribe, the Moro, and I speak Arabic. I’m learning English in school.

After school, I help my mom in the house. I wash the dishes, sweep the floor and do general cleaning. I also play with my siblings, especially my younger brother who is 6. I like to play basketball and sometimes we go to a local sports club to play there.

My favorite food: Eggplant salad (a dip with eggplant, oil, peanut butter and spices)
My favorite subject: Arabic
What I want to be: a pediatrician

How can you greet someone in Arabic?

keefak (Say key-fak)
(Keefak is one of many greetings in Arabic, and it means, “How are you?”)

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Think of a time when you started a new class or visited a new town. What made you feel welcome there? Jesus invites us to welcome everyone. List five ideas for welcoming newcomers. Some ideas may take time, like baking cookies for a new neighbor, or they could be simple, like smiling at a classmate.

①______________________ ②______________________ ③______________________ ④______________________ ⑤ ______________________
What would you take if you had 10 minutes to flee?

People around the world are suddenly uprooted from their homes because of violent conflict and disasters, often without time to take food and items they will need.

② ways to help

Make a financial gift. Visit mcc.org/donate or call 888.563.4676 to give today.

Make a relief kit. Find instructions and drop off locations at mcc.org/relief-kits.