Joining together for a better future in Guatemala
Growing understanding | Adding up savings in Rwanda
**A Common Place**

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**Partnering together**

**J RON BYLER**

**MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:5)

The lead story in this issue tells of a partnership of local families, Guatemalan Mennonites and MCC, responding to a devastating mudslide more than 10 years ago.

Today, community-run organization ANADESA, which grew out of this partnership, provides education opportunities for children.

Seeing each other as part of the body of Christ, “we find that everybody can make a contribution to that mission that we are called for—to serve in the name of Christ,” says Lizette Miranda, an MCC area director for Central America and Haiti.

Last year, MCC’s work in 54 countries in relief, development and peace-building involved 528 partners in 761 projects. MCC, the church and our partners are accountable to each other, learn from each other and together build our ability to do good work.

In this issue, there is evidence of other partnerships—at home and around the world. A teacher in a Brethren Christ school in Zimbabwe talks about how partnering with MCC has “brought hope to the community.”

You are part of this partnership as well—so many people here in the U.S. sharing gifts of time and money to respond to basic human needs and work for peace and justice.

We are one body. Members of one another. Partnering together for the cause of the Gospel. God be praised.

**Cover story**

**Joining together for a better future**

In Guatemala, efforts to promote education and empower women grew out of an MCC-supported disaster response to mudslides.

**10 First person**

Josefa Damán Sosof shares her journey to gaining education and leading an MCC partner organization.

**Features**

12 Growing understanding

An MCC partner in Guatemala encourages young adults and women to embrace their full culture.

14 Adding up the savings in Rwanda

Savings groups help spark new opportunities and build ties among community members.

**Departments**

3 MCC news

16 On assignment

Serving and Learning Together

19 Hello Guatemala

(for children)

**Northeast Asia**

**Work of reconciliation**

The historical wounds and divisions that haunt the region of Northeast Asia also reach deep into the lives of churches and people of faith. A joint effort of MCC and Duke Divinity School, Durham, N.C., brings together religious leaders from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the U.S. Through an annual forum—which Chris Rice of Durham, an MCC representative for Northeast Asia, describes as a sort of “theological fueling station”—leaders such as Jeremiah Choi, left, a Mennonite pastor in Hong Kong, and Yukari Kaga, a Mennonite church leader in Japan, explore Scriptural visions of peace and reconciliation, lament harms done, bear witness to hope and look for fresh ways to collaborate.

**U.S.**

**Restorative justice**

A West Coast MCC restorative justice program is making a difference in classrooms and helping young offenders find alternatives to court proceedings. In Reedley (Calif.) High School and other settings, a restorative justice process is giving educators another option to punishing youth, reducing the number of school suspensions. And the process provides a way for juveniles accused of a crime to examine their actions, listen to the impact of their behavior and make amends instead of entering the criminal court system.

**Burkina Faso**

**Support for orphans**

Around the world, MCC partners such as Song Kibse, an organization whose name means “Welcome the Orphans,” follow Christ’s call to reach out to children who have lost parents. With MCC support, Song Kibse helps children and youth with school fees, apprenticeships and other needs. In the tailoring program, from left, Catherine Ginbega works with seamstress Rosine Omono.

**Zimbabwe**

**Partnership and desks**

The schools of Matabeleland South are among the poorest in Zimbabwe. Teacher Allen Ndlovu recalls using logs and rocks as chairs and tables for his students, but thanks to MCC, that’s no longer the case. “For the first time in my teaching career, I now have enough furniture for my grade six class, a comfortable chair and a desk for my students,” he says.

**Comforters and blankets**

A HANDMADE COMFORTER PROVIDES NOT ONLY WARMTH BUT ALSO A TANGIBLE MESSAGE TO PEOPLE THAT THEIR NEEDS ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.

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Knotted with crochet cotton (not more than 4–8 in apart)

Purchased blankets (twin or full size) and new, flat twin sheets (for hospitals, schools and orphanages) also are needed.

Go to mcc.org/kits/comforters to find a link to more detailed instructions. For drop-off locations, contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2) or go to mcc.org/kits.
Joining together for a better future

Community work grows out of the efforts of MCC, Guatemalan Mennonites and local residents to respond to deadly mudslides.

Josephine Maribel Quinón Chojpen

Josefa Maribel Quinón Chojpen knows how to sew tiny beads into the shape of a quetzal, a striking green, red and white bird with trailing tail feathers that lives in Guatemala’s forests. Between her hands, the 13-year-old can flatten a palm-size ball of corn dough into a tortilla with a staccato clap, clap, clap—a rhythmic deftness honed by years of shaping perfectly round tortillas for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

But last year, when Josefa tried to multiply fractions and complete other sixth-grade math problems, she failed. Her first quarter grade was 20 percent.

Her mother, Maria Chojpen Reanda, knew where to turn.

Reanda had been attending parenting classes at New Dawn Association of Santiago Atitlán, an MCC partner known by its Spanish acronym, ANADESA, and asked for help from the organization’s after-school tutoring program. Two teachers began tutoring Josefa and, along with her mother, regularly consulted with Josefa’s classroom teacher.

This kind of educational partnership and intervention is uncommon in Josefa’s culture.

ANADESA as an organization would not exist without a different partnership—the efforts of local residents, MCC and Guatemalan Mennonites to respond to mudslides that devastated this area 12 years ago.

In the early morning of Oct. 5, 2005, after days of rain from Hurricane Stan, mudslides roiling with boulders and trees crashed into the small town of Panabaj. Residents rushed to rescue neighbors, but around 300 people were killed, most from the Tz’utujil ethnic group.
Mennonites from the church conference Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Guatemala (IEMG) sent an assessment team four days after the mudslides and soon delivered sheets, food and clothing. MCC partnered with IEMG to bring more emergency assistance and work-and-learn teams to support longer-term recovery. In the year after the mudslides, more than 150 people from Guatemala, Belize, Canada, Colombia and the U.S. joined with local people to help respond to the devastation, building 72 houses.

As the three groups—MCC, IEMG and local residents—worked on rebuilding, they also identified other needs in the community and began to organize children’s education and recreation programs, adult literacy classes and a support group for women.

Eventually, through a local initiative and encouragement from MCC and IEMG, these efforts combined in 2008 to become ANADESA—a community-run organization and MCC partner that is focused on strengthening and empowering children, youth and women.

“One of the best things about working in a partnership like this is the long-term commitment of the people that are living there,” says Lizette Miranda of Managua, Nicaragua. She and her husband Cesar Flores are MCC area directors for Central America and Haiti. “They now can carry out the work to improve the lives of their own people.”

MCC supports ANADESA with funding and each year sends a young adult through MCC’s Global Service Learning programs to serve with the staff. Work-and-learn teams have helped ANADESA construct a new building.

“If we see each other as part of the body of Christ… we find that everybody can make a contribution to that mission that we are called for—to serve in the name of Christ,” Miranda says.

By working with local partners, we can address together the most important needs in the community and make a significant difference.”

Today ANADESA’s after-school tutoring program serves more than 90 primary school students from vulnerable families in Panabaj and the nearby village of Chukmuk.

A youth program offers workshops, field trips, sports and service projects. Recently all the youth received several chickens and training on how to fatten them and sell them for a $3 profit they can re-invest in more chickens.

Twice a month women, wearing traditional blouses embroidered with birds and flowers and tucked into long woven skirts, gather at ANADESA’s new building. They come to learn together and to enjoy the break from the often solitary work of beadwork, weaving and embroidery that consumes their waking hours.

Rosario Coché Coó, a single mother of two young children, says she uses what she has learned about nutrition, cooking and hygiene, but what she really likes is the encouragement she gets from the other women.

“Sometimes I get sad just thinking about how to support my children. Sometimes the beadwork doesn’t provide enough money,” says Coó. “But at ANADESA, when I go out and I receive the trainings, I have fun. I smile. So I am able to push aside my thoughts and think about different things.”

Cruz Tzina Vasquez, a widow who runs a small store from the front window of her home, says she has benefited most by learning about business skills and her own rights.

“At first I didn’t know women had a right to provide opinions,” Vasquez says. “Through the workshops, I learned that I had a right to speak my mind.” Now she is a member of ANADESA’s board.
Give a gift—Where needed most
Your gift supports the breadth of MCC’s work, helping to build partnerships so local communities can find new ways to meet their most basic needs and work 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).

High priorities for the board and staff are finding new markets where women can sell beadwork and developing new income-generation projects. But ANADESA urges families to put their strongest hopes for a secure future for their children into education.

Josefa Maribel Quinón Chojpen’s mother, Reanda, says she and her husband are committed to doing whatever they can to get Josefa and her sister, Ana Dolores, an education. So are ANADESA teachers Concepción Esquina Damián and Aricela Magdlena Reanda Ramirez. They figured out one reason Josefa was failing math was because she was scared to ask questions about what she didn’t understand.

“My teacher in sixth grade, she was tough," Josefa explains. “She would get so angry when we failed. I was terrified to talk to her because I was afraid she would hit me.”

So Josefa’s tutors used a variety of methods to explain the math concepts that confused her. They also made a plan of how they—and Josefa’s mother—could regularly consult with the teacher for advice and updates on Josefa’s progress.

Josefa finished the year with a passing grade in all her subjects. “I would not be where I am now in seventh grade if they wouldn’t have helped me,” she says.

Coó wishes her single mother had been able to send her to school. Maybe then she would work in a bank or be a teacher instead of beading all day long.

“The best inheritance we can provide our children is to study,” says Coó. Some parents think giving land is best, she says, but their children can sell the land for a short-term profit.

“If you give them education, they cannot trade it, and nobody can take it away.”

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Matthew Lester is a photographer in Lancaster, Pa.
Josefa Damián Sosof

The president of an MCC partner organization shares her journey to becoming a leader in her community.

AS TOLD TO LINDA ESPENSHADE

I realized that day how important education was.”

I knew some Spanish from reading newspapers and talking with friends. I realized that day how important education was. I needed to know how to write better. As I continued to work with Mennonites in responding to the mudslides, MCC workers encouraged me to get more education. I signed up for literacy school and completed sixth grade when I was 23.

In the months after the mudslides, I helped a group of women cook for the volunteers who were building 72 houses in the area. Those same women began meeting to support each other. Before the storm, women were comfortable staying at home, but now, because many had lost relatives, staying at home was sad. Even after the houses were built, the women’s group continued to meet.

The women chose me to be their leader because I was the only woman to speak Spanish. I learned about their work and problems at home, especially with husbands who would leave their wives. With the encouragement of MCC, Juan Ramirez, Micaela Coché and I began to consider creating an organization to work with women and offer an educational program for children. In 2008, ANADESA or New Dawn Association of Santiago Atitlán was formed. I was the women’s coordinator, and Juan was president.

One of the reasons I was motivated to work with the women was to help them gain power. What I want is for women to participate in different things — church and organizations like ours — because sometimes they feel they are not capable of doing that. I want women to become leaders.

I finished ninth grade in 2014, and in 2015, I became president of ANADESA. I meet with the board and handle the paperwork of the organization. I evaluate the staff. I represent the organization, and I work for the people. One of the ways I’ve changed the most through my experiences with ANADESA is that now I’m able to talk in front of a group, whether small or large. It’s not like I have to stop and think, “Oh, let’s see if I can do this…” I just can. I don’t know where I would be if the brothers and sisters hadn’t come here with support after the storm.

What inspires me is when I see children are continuing with their schooling and that the women also are empowered. In spite of the difficulties we find along the way, I am so inspired to continue working with ANADESA.

Josefa Damián Sosof is president of New Dawn Association of Santiago Atitlán (ANADESA), which grew out of a partnership of local residents, Guatemalan Mennonites and MCC in responding to mudslides that struck Panabaj, Guatemala, in 2005.
By good life, we mean living with nature—having forests, water, food and health.\(^1\)

通过一个MCC支持的项目，在危地马拉，伊西尔的年轻男女获得了成长和学习新技能的机会。这项工作是男女平等的。

### Growing understanding

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#### Story by Linda Espenshade

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As savings groups form, members choose their own leaders, who then coordinate the weekly meetings. From left are president Marceline Ntawigenera, secretary Théogene Maniragaba, treasurer Beatrice Nyirambonera and accountant Elie Nikobizaba.

Adding up the savings in Rwanda

By working together and putting aside small amounts of cash, participants in savings groups are finding new ways to start businesses and improve their lives.

STORY BY MARLA PIERRSON LESTER
PHOTOS BY JAMES SOUDER

Friday morning is savings group time in Kadereri, a rural neighborhood outside the Rwandan city of Musanze.

Each week for a nine-month cycle, 26 women and men gather at 7 a.m.—greeting each other with laughter and conversation and starting the meeting with prayer.

They watch intently as three trusted group members, each with a key to a different lock on the money box, open the metal container that holds cash and share books tracking how much money each member has saved. The amount that each person puts in per week is not large, just about 60 cents to $3.

But through this MCC-supported effort, people are starting new businesses and finding a valued safety net for everything from school fees to health care costs.

“My life has changed so much,” says 47-year-old Marie Godance Murekatete.

The savings group advised her not to rely only on seasonal harvests of bean, maize and potatoes and working in other people’s fields. So she borrowed money to buy charcoal that she could sell in town. Now, instead of asking her husband for money for clothes or soap, “I provide for my family the simple things.”

She took out a loan from the group for school fees, and the money she earned enabled her to repay it.

And being in the group gave her the confidence to join in other community activities and to see herself differently.

“I can tell you I was a village woman who was shy and who thought I didn’t have any potential other than giving birth and I just depended on my husband,” she says. “Now I feel valuable and responsible for my own life.”

Building on two decades of work to foster peace, reconciliation and trust after Rwanda’s 1994 genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group, this project of MCC partner Peace and Development Network (PDN) continues to strengthen community ties and partnerships while helping people find new opportunities to earn and save.

So far, 475 savings groups have formed through the project, which MCC supports by funding a national coordinator, staff in nine districts and training for staff and local village agents who work with group leaders in their communities.

The entire effort is aimed at showing people they have the power to make a difference in their own lives and communities.

For instance, new groups have no startup funds. “They start with what they have,” says PDN president David Bucura. “We do show them how to save from what they have.”

That’s usually a few cents or dollars at a time. But as people begin to save at this level, they’re harnessing the power of amounts of cash that are so tiny they seemed worthless—and therefore easier to waste.

“We couldn’t take small amounts like 1,000 or 2,000 Rwandan francs ($1.25 to $2.50) to the bank,” says the group’s president, 30-year-old Marceline Ntawigenera.

In the past, when she got this amount of cash, she’d spend it. Now, at the weekly meetings, she can buy a savings share for 500 Rwandan francs (about 62 cents) or pay about $3 to buy five shares, the maximum savings amount per week.

After investing money in savings, members can begin to take loans. They may not borrow more than three times the amount they have saved through the group, and loans are at a fixed interest rate, often at 10 percent.

But it’s easier to access cash through the group than through a bank, and interest payments go directly back to
When his savings group in Kadereri began in 2015, secretary Théogene Maniragaba recalls the most difficult part was that some members thought the effort would work, some thought it wouldn’t and others were waiting to see. But the 33-year-old, who used to spend all he earned from his construction job, watched as his savings and the savings of the group began to grow over time. And the ties among group members grew closer. “Now we all work together, we work hard as a team and help each other to be where we are now,” he says.

Antonciata Uwizeyimana, left, with son Uwidohaye, and Esperance Nyiramajyambere, with daughter Alliance Nyiramugisha, turn in share books at a savings group meeting.

“It showed me I could do more and encouraged me to sacrifice more for saving.”

For him, though, the best thing about the group is not the money itself — but the trust and unity members have built to help each other develop their lives. “The group helped us to come together to join our hands as a family,” he says.

Just as relationships build over time, so the group’s savings grow as members borrow money and pay interest. Also, at each meeting, members donate an agreed-upon amount — 100 Rwandan francs (about 12 cents) — to a fund that helps others in the group in times of crisis. Transparency and trust are critical. Savings are handed over within the group, and at each meeting leaders announce totals of the savings fund and the fund to help others. There’s good reason for that.

Ntawigenera was part of a savings group before, but the leader took members’ money. She had no interest in joining another group but over time she saw how neighbors in a PDN savings group were able to save and how their lives changed. “I was motivated by the results,” she says. Just talking about joining a group sparked change in her family.

Knowing she could not come up with savings each week from the crops she was growing, Ntawigenera took the money she could from her bean harvest, 2,000 francs ($2.50), got 3,000 francs ($3.70) from her husband and bought two 20-liter jerry cans of milk to sell in town. She used the earnings for savings and to buy more milk to sell, eventually growing her business.

With a loan from the group, she bought her family health insurance, which the Rwandan government provides for a fee of 3,000 francs ($3.70) per family member per year. After nine months, when the savings from the group were divided out to group members based on how many shares they had purchased, she was able to rent two fields for two years — creating another stream of income.

Now, the group is in its second nine-month cycle, and she hopes to buy a cow with the money she receives at the end of this cycle.

It’s a success that’s being repeated across groups. Of the first 95 groups started through this project, all but two started a second round of savings. “They see the change. They see the transformation of their lives,” PDN president Bucura says. “They see the importance.”

Marla Pierson Lester is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. James Souder of Harrisonburg, Va., took these photos while with MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program.
“The more time I am able to spend with people here, the more I love this country.”

KRISTA VANDERHOUT

Serving and Learning Together

Name: Krista VanderHout
Hometown: Hamilton, Ontario (The Commons church)

Assignment: Through MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program, I work with Mennonite Christian Service Foundation of India (MCSFI), a service and fellowship organization of Anabaptists in India.

Typical days: Visiting projects supported by MCSFI or that bring Anabaptists together in India. My first visit was to an amazing example of a successful MCSFI food project! I saw neat rows of corn and rice paddies, healthy cattle, goats and pigs and a wall that reroutes a stream for irrigation and drinking water. Women told me about the chicken barns they planned and created through self-help groups.

In October, I joined women from nine different Anabaptist conferences for a weekend of fellowship and sharing. At another event, a Sunday school competition, children competed in song, dance, theater and art. My favorite part was the dancing! By the end of the music, all the children were in the front of the small chapel praising God with such fervor. It was intoxicating and brought to mind the passages of David dancing without inhibition!

Joys: Meeting people from Anabaptist conferences all over India and seeing how they’re working together. I’ve been welcomed as family in many homes and made friends everywhere I’ve gone.

Challenge: Not blending in. I do what I can to avoid looking like a tourist, but I have just no way of accomplishing that in India.

Explore SALT

Through MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program, young adults from Canada and the U.S. are immersed in another culture for a year as they serve in fields such as education, agriculture, peacebuilding and more. Know young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 who might be interested? Send them to mcc.org/salt to learn more.

Go to serve.mcc.org, 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.

My name is Justo Antonio de León de la Cruz.
Age: 9
Lives in: Chukmuk, Guatemala

I live near a big lake, Lake Atitlán, and I can see two volcanoes from my house. Someday I would like to travel across the lake to towns on the other side.

I live with my three sisters and my mom. My father died when I was young, I help my mother by feeding the chickens and pigeons. My mother taught me how to sew a star with beads for a keychain.

In second grade. After school I go to tutoring (supported by MCC), where teachers show me how to do my homework. I learn computers and math there and read books.

I speak two languages. We speak Tz’utujil (sue-to-heel) and my mother also taught me Spanish.

When I am not studying or doing chores, I like to play soccer with the kids at school, and I go to church in the city of Santiago Atitlán. I pray every night when I go to bed.

Guatemala

How do you say hello in Tz’utujil (an Indigenous language)?

utz awach

(Say “OOTZ ah-watch”)

My favorite food: chicken
My favorite subject: math
What I want to be: lawyer

In Guatemala, brightly colored birds and designs often are sewn onto bags, clothing and other items. Choose colors to make your own design.

For a larger, printable version of this coloring page, see Hello Guatemala online at mcc.org/hello

18 A COMMON PLACE WINTER 2017
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