Refugees in Jordan: Not home yet | Meeting needs in eastern Congo | Reuniting families
Entertaining angels

J RON BYLER MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:40)

Having just experienced the Christmas season, it is easy to see the parallels in Ola and Oman’s story in “Not home yet” with the birth of our Savior. Jesus was a refugee too, born in Bethlehem, in a manger, with no room in the inn. And then we read Jesus’ words in Matthew 25, that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome Jesus.

In Jordan, Syrian refugee families like Ola and Oman have received thousands of comforters and hygiene kits because of your commitment to welcome the stranger. MCC is working with its partners in Jordan to walk alongside these refugees. In this issue, you have an additional opportunity to respond to the Middle East crisis by supporting peace-building and relief efforts.

Through an MCC partner organization, Laith Eskander’s family received help when they fled from Iraq to Jordan. Now he is helping other Iraqi Christian and Muslim refugee families. Laith says that, as a Christian, he believes that Jesus is calling him to help all people, regardless of their religion.

In another story in this issue, we hear about Christians in eastern Congo who, in the midst of ongoing trauma and violence, continue reaching out to neighbors and newcomers who have lost their homes. MCC is supporting their efforts to provide shelter, food and health care, and the MCC U.S. Washington Office is helping us learn more about the root causes of this conflict, including the role of our own government.

Jesus’ call to welcome the stranger is reflected clearly in the actions of these Christians. And we, too, through MCC’s work around the world, can show hospitality to strangers and, by doing so, entertain angels (Hebrews 13:2).

Cover story
1. Not home yet
Jordan has a history of welcoming newcomers, including most recently those fleeing violence in Syria.

10. First person
Laith Eskander

Features
12. Meeting needs in eastern Congo
In Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, entire communities have left home due to violence. MCC’s program directors reflect on the suffering they’ve seen there and how churches are meeting urgent needs and caring for displaced families.

16. Reuniting families
A Colombian family torn apart by violence reunites in Canada with assistance from MCC and an Alberta congregation.

Departments
3. MCC news
18. On assignment
MCC warehouse manager
19. Hello Jordan (for children)

Editor’s note:
We share with sadness the news that 10-year-old Elizabeth Kiden, who was featured in the fall 2012 magazine on the Hello children’s series in Haiti’s Artibonite Valley, produced more than 500,000 seedlings a year. Trees provide fruit, help preserve soil and bring hope in an environmentally devastated region. “These trees are our lives,” says Soufrana Elisso. “They allow us to eat and make a living and send our kids to school.” While MCC’s earthquake response is fully funded, the tree-planting effort is one of MCC’s 2013 giving projects. Find more projects online at donnem.ca or contact your nearest MCC office.

Relief kits
Provide needed supplies for families forced from home by war or disasters.

MCC-supported tree nurseries provide opportunity for Soufrana Elisso.

MCC news
Find more news at: mcc.org/news

MCC-supported tree nurseries provide opportunity for Soufrana Elisso.

Relief kits
Provide needed supplies for families forced from home by war or disasters.

West Africa
Food crisis
MCC continues to respond to a food and malnutrition crisis in the Sahel region in West Africa. In Burkina Faso, rations of food and grain assistance this past summer made it possible for 611 families to eat two meals a day, giving farmers a chance to work in their fields instead of migrating to work in mines to provide food for their families. MCC also supports emergency food assistance in Mali and food-for-work and cash-for-work activities in Niger.

2 wide-tooth combs (8-8 in)
1 large bar of soap (good quality)
1 box of adhesive bandages (minimum 40 count, assorted)
1 package sanitary pads (18-24 count thin max)
Not home yet

For decades Jordan has provided hospitality and refuge for those fleeing violence. Today the tradition continues, with MCC supporting Jordanian efforts to welcome refugees.

BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SILAS CREWS

n a three-room apartment in Zarqa, Jordan, a television broadcasts nonstop, black and white video footage of the fighting in Syria—a link to the country Ola and Omar are waiting to see again.

The newly married couple left Homs, Syria, in January 2012, fleeing to Jordan only 20 days after moving into a house that Omar, a pastry chef, had worked hard to finish for Ola, who was pregnant with their first child.

Since then, Ola gave birth to a daughter, and the family moved into an office building converted into apartments for refugees. They share the space with Omar’s brother, his wife, and two children, one of whom lost most of his hearing to the sound of a bomb. (Syrian refugees interviewed for this article asked that their last names not be used for security reasons.)

The news, Ola and Omar have seen footage of their neighborhood and know their house was destroyed. “We cry. We are sad,” says Omar, “but we can’t change or do anything. I have a lot of friends who are not here, but our homes are destroyed. What can we do?”

That doesn’t stop them from waiting to go back to Homs, just as soon as the fighting stops.

The desire to return is strong for Syrian refugees, many of whom spend their days simply waiting to go back. The same desire is echoed by the 2.7 million Palestinians living in Jordan—some of whom have been waiting since 1948 to return to land and homes illegally seized by the Israeli occupation. Other refugees from various countries also wait in Jordan—either to go home or to find a new permanent home.

MCC supports the efforts of Jordanian partner organizations to walk alongside refugees and their Jordanian hosts, meeting immediate needs for refugees such as those from Syria and helping other, longer-term refugees continue...
through domestic violence. The YWCA, an MCC partner, offers classes to women and youth, teaching about the rights that women have, offering training in income generation and strategies to address conflict, tensions and violence. Some men come with their wives to learn communication and problem-solving skills.

One instructor says as men learn that women know their rights and have a supportive community, the likelihood of violence decreases. Also, when women gain skills to earn a living, some of the financial stresses lessen. Classes help young people learn what healthy relationships should be like.

Syrian refugee Ibrahim sits in a one-room dwelling where he lives with his wife Odeya and baby Majid, as well as Odeya’s brother Achmad. Many of their household goods, including blankets and a relief kit, were distributed by MCC partner Caritas Jordan.
The problem for Iraqi refugees, who fled their country during and after the U.S. invasion in 2003, can be one of isolation as they wait for the United Nations to relocate them. Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), an MCC partner, brings refugees in Amman together to learn English and computer skills during afternoon and evening classes.

“We want our kids to learn English,” says John Phameen, who brings his sons, Oras, 3, and Firas, 5, to the children’s classes, supported by MCC with food, play areas, fans, educational materials and teacher salaries. “It is important for their future.”

When the September session started, children kept coming into the classroom, squeezing into one more tiny, plastic chair after another until there was absolutely no more room. During the summer, teacher Shahed George had more than 50 students in her class, causing her to ask for volunteers. In September, another teacher was added, allowing for two classes for younger children.

While Phameen’s sons are learning songs and rhymes and English vocabulary, Phameen and his sister are taking classes upstairs, taught predominantly by Iraqi educators who also fled their country. Classes are held for students young and old and bring together refugees from a variety of countries and backgrounds.

The children’s program is critical, George says, because most families don’t have grandmothers or grandfathers to watch the children while parents take classes. “They don’t have anyone to help them.”

The community that develops at the center is as important as the education, says Laith Eskander, an Iraqi refugee who works as the family visits coordinator for JRS. Before he worked there, he learned English and computer skills at JRS, but it was the community he connected with that had the biggest impact. (Read more about Eskander on page 10.)

While he waits to see if his own future is in Jordan, Iraq or somewhere else, Eskander says the JRS community has helped him cope with being away from home. “Just to be out with others and mix with others is a better way to make your life good,” says Eskander, whose family was relatively isolated before he got involved with JRS. “To be alone without help, you have a bigger problem. That’s what I learned from JRS. Community puts better things in our lives.”

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Silas Crews is photographer and multimedia producer for MCC U.S.

Give a gift — Middle East crisis
Support MCC’s work to meet basic needs and to promote peace through trainings in conflict prevention, trauma healing and peacebuilding skills. Read more about MCC’s Middle East response at mcc.org/middleeastcrisis.

$46 provides an infant with a two-month supply of milk powder.
$140 provides a day of peacebuilding training for Syrian refugee leaders.
Send contributions in enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).
I t’s very hard for any person to be a refugee, especially in the time when we came to Jordan. In 1995, when I was 17 years old, I fled from Iraq to Jordan, as many young men did, so I would not be drafted. I feared they would ask me to fight and do things without reason. My mother, who is Palestinian, and my sister came too. My father, who is Iraqi, died when I was 11 or 12.

We had some money from my father, and I worked several kinds of short-term jobs with poor pay because they knew I was a refugee. Employers preferred to hire an Iraqi because it is less expensive. They have to pay insurance if they hire a Jordanian. We earned low wages, working 12 to 13 hours a day. At the time, if we worked illegally and authorities caught us, we got deported to our home country.

It’s a hard life, living without hope, working illegally, without social security, without health insurance. My mother suffered from liver disease. She began vomiting blood. I took her to a hospital. I spent hours with friends and teachers, laughing and talking.

Eventually, JRS asked me to work for them, doing home visits with refugees. As I visited, I heard about common needs. They needed to learn English because most expected to move to a third country where English is spoken. Most had little income and couldn’t pay rent, couldn’t pay for medical treatment, couldn’t pay for food. Even recently, families coming to Jordan have no mattresses, no furniture, nothing.

I can help by leading families to other nongovernmental organizations or using JRS’ small emergency budget and supplies. I invite them to school to study English and to social events to meet other refugees. Most of our visits are just talking to people—giving them hope, giving them ideas for solutions, encouraging them to work for their future.

We visit Iraqi Christians and Iraqis Muslims. Now I am starting to visit Syrian families, even Sudanese and Somali.

As a Christian, I know Jesus loves every single person. He sacrificed for all people, not caring about their race, religions or beliefs. That encourages me to walk in this way. As a Christian I believe in helping others regardless of religion.

Refugees need different kinds of support. It’s not about money all the time. A huge number of refugees, 65 to 70 percent, are poor; on the other side there are many rich families, but they are refugees too.

One story that sticks in my mind: There was an Iraqi family. The father took his pregnant daughter to a service at Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, Iraq. While she was there, several suicide bombers came in and other people threw grenades and shots. The woman and her baby were killed.

When I met the family in Amman, their son was suffering, in need of psychosocial support. The family was alone in their pain.

We thought it was helpful for the son to come to JRS. I invited the boy’s parents to social gatherings. It was helpful for them to meet with others. They weren’t going to church after this happened to their daughter. Father Yousef did a Mass for them in a small church at the Jesuit Center.

Refugees need to be with people. They need to get out from their suffering. I learned this from JRS.

I know so many people now. In two and a half years of working for JRS, I’ve learned to know more people than I did in the 14 years before that. Other refugees invite me, my mother and sister to visit them. I invite people to come to my family’s house. Recently a new family came to visit mine and brought a cake.

I am not just helping them; they are helping me somehow. When people ask me for help, they teach me how to ask for help, they teach me how to ask for help, they teach me how to ask for help. Sometimes it is not a shame to ask questions or to ask someone how to get somewhere. It’s not begging.

From their stories, I learned how they passed through their suffering and how they face the future, still full of hope sometimes. I hear advice. I share what I know with them, and they share what they know with me.

It’s good there are people to encourage others to learn and to continue thinking about the future and not to give up. This is the meaning of community—not to forget about others. ■

Laith Eskander is the family visits coordinator for Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), an MCC partner organization in Jordan, and is working on a certificate in database management that he hopes to use to help JRS manage its work with refugees. Go to page 4 to read more about MCC’s work with JRS or see the children’s content on page 19, which features a student in a JRS after-school program.
Meeting needs in eastern Congo

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1.5 million people have been forced from home by violence and conflict. MCC’s program directors reflect on the suffering and perseverance they’ve seen there.

BY MARLA PIERSON LESTER

Jesus is light.” When MCC U.S. program director Ruth Kriedel Clemens saw the words printed in French and local Congolese languages on Rukimba Furaha’s blouse, she recognized the fabric immediately.

It is what Protestant churchwomen throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo use for choir uniforms and outfits for special church days, as well as for everyday use.

And the blouse made from this fabric was among the few possessions that Furaha was able to bring with her when she and her eight children, the oldest of whom is 10, fled home, joining other community members to walk almost 40 miles to safety.

For nearly two decades, local and regional militias and rebel groups have threatened remote areas of eastern Congo’s North and South Kivu provinces, taking control of villages, attacking people and forcing whole communities to flee for their lives.

In a dusty schoolyard near the city of Goma, where about 100 families were sleeping in a handful of classrooms, Furaha met with Clemens and other MCC representatives who visited in summer 2012 along with emergency services staff of partner organization the Church of Christ in Congo or Eglise du Christ au Congo (ECC).

A week after fleeing, Furaha recounted how she and her children waited as an armed group approached, hoping to stay long enough for the crops nearly ripe in her fields to be ready for harvest. In the end, she left without them, losing her family’s food as well as her home.

“These are just some of the visible signs of this neglected conflict that continues to uproot and kill thousands of people in eastern Congo,” Clemens says.

Even as families such as Furaha’s are affected, Christians are reaching out, ministering through the ECC and through individual congregations sharing what they can with their neighbors and newcomers.

A congregation that Clemens visited, Katoyi Free Methodist Church, opened its property and its primary school to provide temporary shelter and assistance to more than 300 families who had fled home, including some who moved to Katoyi from the school where Clemens met Furaha. MCC supports these efforts, providing emergency assistance such as additional food, household items and health care for those sheltering at the site, and paying to refill the cisterns so that displaced families would continue to have a source of clean water for drinking, cooking and washing.

Elsewhere in eastern Congo, MCC is providing $275,000 for food, seeds and tools for displaced families and their local hosts in Masisi and Mwenga. MCC’s Global Family education program supports three schools as they welcome more than 300 students from camps for displaced people in Shasha and Mubimbi.

But as the displacement continues, MCC Congo and MCC’s advocacy offices also call on people to learn more about the root causes of the conflict, the roles foreign governments and multinational corporations play and the immensity of the suffering.

Eastern Congo is rarely seen in news headlines, flashing across TV screens or topping Internet news listings. Yet conflict there is taking a staggering toll.

As this issue went to press in late November, the rebel military group M23 had taken control of Goma and forced the national army to retreat from its defense of the city. MCC workers in Congo are deeply concerned about the impact of this situation on the rapidly growing numbers of internally displaced people in eastern Congo. ECC workers in Goma and Bukavu are working closely with MCC on possible further responses.

These are just some of the visible signs of this neglected conflict that continues to uproot and kill thousands…”
In 2008, Willie Reimer, MCC Canada program director, visited the region, including one of the same camps for displaced people that Clemens visited in 2012. In place after place, he listened to stories of people forced from their homes by armed groups, whole communities that planted but could not harvest.

Then serving as MCC’s director of food, disaster and material resources, Reimer had visited MCC projects around the world that reach out to people forced from home. The situation is different in eastern Congo, Reimer stresses. Unlike families losing a home once to a disaster, people are being forced from home again and again. Many lose everything, then return and work to rebuild their lives—only to be forced to flee again as another armed group, or sometimes the same one, invades their community.

In the midst of tragedy, though, Reimer also was struck by the perseverance of the people of the church in reaching out to their neighbors. It’s a strength that for Clemens echoes what her father, Levi Keidel, learned as he, along with his spouse Eudene and their young children, worked in Congo in the early 1960s, with what is now Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission. It was a turbulent time when other armed groups swept through the countryside.

“My father used to describe his Congolese colleagues as being like young trees,” Clemens says. “They bend way over in the wind as if they could snap, and yet they continue to stand strong.” That strength is at work today, not just in the people Clemens met in camps for internally displaced people, but also at Katoyi Free Methodist Church.

In a region where resources already are strained by poverty, members gladly shared clothing and food such as beans and potatoes with the displaced families. Church leaders are providing a building with three rooms that can be used as a health center, says Fidele Kyanza, a church member and director of the ECC ministry that assists displaced people. And the congregation is welcoming newcomers into church life, inviting them into choirs and to join morning prayers. Children from the church and from the displaced families play together.

When people began to arrive, it was clear the congregation would respond. “They are people in need, and we’re the church,” Kyanza says. That dedication is something Clemens carries in her heart even months after her visit. “It’s amazing,” Clemens says. “These are not wealthy people, but people who are showing their compassion as Christians. They’re following Christ’s call to reach out to those in need.”

Learn more
Go to washington.mcc.org/DRCongo to learn more about the current conflict in eastern Congo and how it is influenced by U.S. public policy.

Give a gift – Congo emergency assistance
Support MCC’s efforts to meet immediate needs and work for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Send contributions in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office.
Reuniting families

More than a decade after violence tore apart a Colombian family, members reunite in Canada with assistance from MCC and an Alberta congregation.

BY JULIE BELL
PHOTOGRAPH BY JOANIE PETERS

On Sept. 29, 1998, as Marly Yanez and her family gathered in their home in northeast Colombia for a birthday celebration, armed men stormed in and began shooting.

Yanez, who was 9, watched in horror as her mother was killed. “They said she was working for the government,” Yanez says. “But the only thing my mom did was sell food. She sold food to everyone. She was innocent.”

Caught in Colombia’s long-running armed conflict between the government and paramilitary and guerrilla groups, the family’s sense of safety and home was shattered.

Fearing further retribution, Yanez’s father sent Yanez and her three older sisters to separate locations to live with relatives and her brother to another congregation.

Within days of arriving in Calgary, Yanez was going from church to church. She asked for help with bringing nine members of her family to Canada—her three sisters, their husbands and three children. “We met lots of people who said we are sorry for your situation, but we have a small church and we cannot bring so large a family,” she says.

At the same time, she was working long hours as a cleaning woman to help support her family in Colombia and consoling her sisters as they waited to come.

In 2009, after almost two years of searching, she heard about MCC and found the MCC Alberta office in Calgary. Orlando Vasquez, now MCC Alberta’s program director, says MCC Alberta staff understood Yanez’s distress. Refugee families “have survived war and persecution in their home country,” he says. “Then they come here and have relatives overseas going through that problem and they don’t have a way to help.”

Since 1979, MCC Canada’s refugee assistance program has enabled congregations and other sponsoring groups to fund one-year sponsorships for more than 70,000 people resetting in Canada. The program matches sponsors with refugees who qualify for resettlement in Canada and helps both parties with information, training and other supports.

MCC can’t help meet the needs of every refugee. Due to recent legislative changes, for instance, today Yanez and her sisters would no longer be eligible to apply for refugee status in Canada while living in Colombia. But through the years, MCC has worked alongside refugees to help them understand their options under current law, learn about available resources and connect with sponsors when possible.

At first, staff at MCC said they might be able to help bring one couple to Canada. Yanez was devastated. “For me to choose just one was very difficult,” she recalls. “I said all of them are in danger.”

Yanez persisted, asking MCC to reconsider and saying she would pay $5,000 of the sponsorship costs. Moved by her determination, MCC staff members searched for sponsorship options, including approaching a Mennonite church more than 600 miles north of Calgary. The La Cret Christian Fellowship (LCCF) has an emergency assistance fund for refugees. Jake Elias has been a member of LCCF for almost 20 years and was treasurer when the fund was established. He says it’s designed for cases such as Yanez’s. “MCC is the relief wing of our church and it does great work. They shouldn’t have to rely on donations from individuals. We churches have to do our part,” he says.

The LCCF fund covered the bulk of the costs of bringing Yanez’s family to Calgary. Yanez contributed $5,000 from her income.

In July 2010, the nine newcomers arrived—co-sponsored as refugees by Yanez and the LCCF.

“I wasn’t alone anymore,” Yanez says, recalling that moment. “I was feeling like this is really my country, because my family is here.”

As she sits in her home, surrounded by family, Janez describes MCC and LCCF as gifts from God.

“The best thing that ever happened to me is to find them,” Yanez says. “Many churches said there’s nothing we can do. MCC didn’t say no. They said we will see. We will try to find a solution. And they did. What they did I will never forget.”

Julie Bell is senior writer/editor for Mennonite Canada. Joanie Peters is a photographer in Winnipeg, Man.
MCC warehouse manager

Name: Gordon Letkeman

Hometown: Morden, Man. (Morden Mennonite Church)

Assignment: As manager for MCC’s Canadian Central Warehouse located in Plum Coulee, Man., I oversee groups coming in to volunteer, shipments going out and coming in, inventory of supplies and maintenance for the facility.

Typical day: Every day is different. On Tuesdays, when most volunteers come, the groups sewing or organizing comforters and blankets go immediately to work. Other volunteers check shipments from the provinces or load shipments to go overseas. I work alongside volunteers and talk with them. When no volunteer groups are here, there are reports and paperwork to be done, as well as arranging for shipments and trucks to carry materials.

Joys: Sealing a container and then saying a blessing over it, just knowing that all the hard work done by so many volunteers is headed to a country with so many needs. Another joy is getting to know new people—not just the volunteers but also the material resources managers across Canada and the U.S. I have made some great friendships with all of them.

Challenge: I have great volunteers, some from families that were helped by MCC. But most are older, and I wonder where the next generation of volunteers will come from.

Find your place, at home

Thousands of people partner together to make the work that MCC does possible.

Go to mcc.org/getinvolved to see how you can make a difference through MCC, or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

Volunteers are needed to help organize and pack material resources and to make MCC kits or comforters (mcc.org/kits). They help to can meat for hungry people around the world (canning.mcc.org), or to run relief sales (reliefsales.mcc.org) and thrift shops (thrift.mcc.org) that help bring in funds to support MCC’s work.

Welcoming strangers

Because of harsh conditions in the desert, Jordan’s bedouins, or herders, would traditionally offer three days of hospitality to anyone who came to their tents needing a place to stay and food to eat. Today, the country of Jordan continues the tradition of welcome. More than half of the people who live in Jordan are refugees or born to refugees!

Fill in the words of Hebrews 13:2

Do ______ neglect to show ______ to ______, for by doing that some have entertained ______ without knowing it.

Answers: not, hospitality, strangers, angels

My name is Mohammad.

Age: 8

Lives in: Amman, Jordan

My family came to Jordan a few months ago. We used to live in Homs, Syria, but left because of the fighting. Syria is my country. It’s where my home and friends were. Jordan is not my country, but for now we are safer in Jordan.

In Amman, I live in an apartment with my parents, my sister and my brother. My school begins at 7:30 and ends at 1. I eat lunch at home then go to an after-school program (that MCC supports through Jesuit Refugee Services). I take English and Arabic classes and play basketball and soccer there. My favorite soccer team is Barcelona.

At home, I play with the few toys I brought from Syria. One of my favorites is my stuffed animal, Eeyore. I also run errands for my mother, like buying milk or medicine, and my father oversees my homework.

My favorite food: fish

My favorite subject: English

What I want to be: engineer
Create your own fundraising page on MCC’s new online giving registry. Pick an MCC project or theme such as hope, food or water. Include a personal message if you like. Share the link to your page on Facebook, through email or in an event invitation. 
donate.mcc.org/givingregistry

your passion + our projects
making a difference
together

David Mauro and Laura Rosenberger of Charlottesville, Va., created an MCC giving registry page in honor of their wedding, sparking some $2,500 in giving that MCC can use where needed most. “We are so fortunate and wanted to share that good fortune,” Rosenberger says.

To celebrate her own strides against cerebral palsy, Elizabeth Sawatzky in Vancouver, British Columbia, conquered 2,830 stairs to climb Vancouver’s Grouse Mountain, raising $3,500 for MCC’s work with students with disabilities in Sudan.

weddings
anniversaries
birthdays
sports challenges