Increasing incomes in Vietnam | Stitching possibilities
Little by little, growing a business in Burundi
Building a better future

J RON BYLER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid... (Micah 4:4)

All people have a right to live, to work, and to take care of their families. That seems like a fair expectation.

And yet, for many people in many different parts of the world, this right is only a dream.

In the Quang Ngai Province of Vietnam, children are born with disabilities each year because of the extensive use of dioxin-contaminated Agent Orange by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War about 50 years ago.

The Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA) provides a center where children with disabilities receive care and physical therapy—giving their parents time to work in their fields, go to the market or run a business.

Through a VAVA cow bank, families affected by Agent Orange receive a cow and share the first calf with another family. One family at a time, the cow bank is helping families invest in their own future.

When I was in central rural Burundi in 2014, I visited the carpentry shop featured on page 16. After graduating from an MCC vocational training program with the Christian Union for Peace and Development, these young men set up their own business in an open-air carpentry shop and began making doors, windows and chairs for families in surrounding communities.

The prophet Micah’s vision is that all people everywhere will one day live in security and prosperity. It is our vision as well.

Around the world, your support of MCC’s livelihoods projects is changing peoples’ lives, expanding their incomes and giving people new ways to work and build a better future. Thank you.

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Cover story

4 Care and cows to increase incomes in Vietnam

MCC supports efforts to reach out to families suffering from the effects of Agent Orange, a continuing legacy of the Vietnam War.

10 First person

Phan Thanh Long talks about his work with those affected by Agent Orange.

Features

12 Stitching possibilities

In MCC programs from Cambodia to South Sudan, sewing opens opportunity.

16 Little by little, growing a business

Through an MCC-supported program in Burundi, young people are learning trades.

Departments

3 MCC news

16 On assignment

19 Hello Vietnam

(For children)

Honduras

Starting a grocery

As a single mother in Ocrotuna, Honduras, Maria Martinez struggled to make ends meet by washing and ironing clothes and selling tamales.

Then, a loan through MCC and the Social Development Committee of the Brethren in Christ churches in Honduras (CODESO) gave her the chance to start a small grocery store at home. She used her first profits to buy a refrigerator and began selling cold foods. Her finances improved. And by working from home, she’s able to spend more time with her children, ages 6 and 1.

Zimbabwe

Reaching youth

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, youth who have fallen behind in their schooling because of being orphaned or because of abuse have few prospects to earn a living. MCC supports the work of the Sandra Jones Centre to provide vocational training in raising rabbits, poultry and vegetables, as well as marketing, budgeting and bookkeeping for small businesses.

Palestine and Israel

Rooftop gardens

In Jerbeh al-Dhib, Palestine, MCC and partner Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem (ARIJ) are helping families experiment with rooftop vegetable beds—which include water reservoirs, sun screens and compost—and with drip irrigation systems for home gardens. The village’s water supply is severely affected by water consumption in a nearby Jewish settlement. Families use rooftop beds, more efficiently than they could in a field.

Comfy and blankets

Give hope and comfort. A handmade Comforter provides not only warmth but also a tangible message to people that their needs are not forgotten.

Use new or nearly new material

Single/twin size preferred (approx 60 x 80 in); double/full size accepted (approx 82 x 90 in)

Winter weight preferred (please use new quilt batting)

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/its/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/its.
Care and cows to increase incomes in Vietnam

For families living with the devastating effects of Agent Orange, an MCC-supported care center and cow project provide new opportunities to work and build a more secure future.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SAWATZKY

For the past 14 years, Trịnh Thị Sơn has bathed her son and fed him. She has carried him to the rice fields because he can barely walk and to the market because no one is willing to watch him. At home, she has to watch him constantly or he will crawl away.

“I feel sad that my son has this disability and sometimes I don’t like it at all,” says Sơn as tears flow. “I wish I could give him my brain so he would know everything.”

Huỳnh Quang Phi Long’s mental and physical disabilities, like most suffered by people in Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam, are linked to the extensive use of dioxin-contaminated Agent Orange, one of several herbicides used during the Vietnam War. For Sơn, though, the cause is not as significant as the emotional and economic pressures of today.

With Long needing constant care, Sơn could not do much to help her husband, a security guard, support Long and their other son and her elderly in-laws, with whom they live. Until recently, the family had only just enough money to feed themselves, she says, but not for Long’s medical care and certainly not for the care he will need in the future.

“I am afraid that one day I will die. Who is going to take care of my children?” Sơn asks, openly sobbing.

The cries of Sơn and others who have
family members with disabilities are all too common.

MCC is responding by supporting two initiatives of partner Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA)—a daytime care center and a cow bank program—that help families better support themselves now and increase their economic capacity for the future. 

Son certainly is not alone. About 25,000 families in Quang Ngai Province have family members with disabilities, most associated with exposure to Agent Orange, according to Phan Thanh Long, chairman of VAVA in Quang Ngai.

The province was sprayed heavily with Agent Orange to clear vegetation during the war, affecting civilians and soldiers on both sides of the conflict. And the horror continues, with birth defects, cancers and neurological disorders affecting young people born long after the war ended.

Collective evidence from multiple studies has led scientists, doctors and others, including the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, to associate a variety of health conditions with exposure to dioxin-contaminated Agent Orange. The effects can be passed on from parent to child and can even skip a generation. 

Huy Phan Thanh Long, 14, whose disabilities are attributed to his grandmother’s exposure, started going to VAVA’s daycare center three months after it opened in February 2015. Each day, caregivers greet him. They support him while he walks or help him into a wheelchair, feed him lunch, interact with him and help him to use the exercise equipment.

While Long is taken care of, Son can focus on her work in the rice field. And she took on a second job, cleaning a secondary school, which earns her an extra 800,000 dong ($40) each month.

“Now with this money, I can buy vitamins, and when my children are sick, I can bring them to see the doctor and pay the bill,” she says. Eventually, she would like to start a small business selling candy at the school.

MCC provided a clean water system and exercise equipment for the center and funding for local doctors to train staff and families in physical therapy techniques. In 2016, a new MCC worker, who is an occupational therapist, is scheduled to begin working with the center.

“It’s like we have a spark that has started burning,” says VAVA’s Chairman Long. “MCC made it like a flame. We want to have that flame to help many other people and care for other people.”

That’s how MCC works alongside partners around the world—helping an initiative to grow by matching the expertise, passion and local connections of the partner with MCC’s funding, people and experience in development.

“When designing and implementing projects, we want to invest in building a partner’s capacity throughout the project,” says Karen Treadway, an MCC Vietnam representative from Hillsboro, Ore. “That way, the partner is equipped to keep fanning and feeding the flame long after MCC’s part of the project is completed, and even to begin new sparks in other areas of their own communities.”

The cow bank that MCC supports through VAVA started with another small spark in 2015, with just 20 families who received a female cow, a larger investment than families could make on their own.

When that cow has its first calf, its owner gives the calf to repay the loan. Female calves are given directly to other families affected by Agent Orange. VAVA sells male calves to help purchase a female calf for a family. In 2016 and 2017, 40 more families will get cows and they will pass on the firstborn calf. Ultimately, the hope is that every family affected by Agent Orange in this area will own a cow, says Vuong Quoc Chinh, MCC project manager.

“Even though the investment of the cows is very small, it has a lot of meaning,” says VAVA Chairman Long. “The final results will become very big.”

That’s exactly what Phùng Thị Tuyết hopes for. Her 19-year-old son, born with brain damage and a disfiguring muscular disease, spends his days lying on a woven grass mat, communicating by smiles and moans.

Phùng Thị Tuyết holds her 19-year-old, Trần Minh Sơn, who was born with disabilities associated with Agent Orange. She is hoping the cows she received through an MCC-supported project will lead to a business raising cows, helping to provide for Sơn as she and her husband grow older.
Tuyết supplements the family’s income by growing specialty mushrooms, but she worries about a crisis, like the flood that damaged their house a few years ago, and about how her son will be taken care of when she and her husband can no longer do it.

“I want to have a saving pot, like cows and more cows, and one day when we need money, we will sell them,” Tuyết says. “When I die in the future, there will be some money for someone to take care of him.”

Selling a year-old cow can bring as much as 20 million dong ($890), says Chiến, which can buy a good motorbike, pay for education or provide startup funding to open a small business. Cows can be fed inexpensively if people grow elephant grass.

Families are pouring their hopes into the project.

Lê Mạnh Châu’s body is covered with fleshy growths, a condition that started when he was young, probably because of his father’s exposure to Agent Orange. His 20-year-old son has mental disabilities and has just begun to develop growths on his body too. Châu used to rely on earnings from heavy construction work, which he can no longer do because of an accident that broke his legs, one so badly it still has six screws in it.

As his wife works extra to keep the family afloat financially, Châu throws his energies into giving his cow the best life he can, hoping it will be his new source of income. He attended VAVA trainings on how to raise a cow and is carefully applying what he has learned.

His neighbors, who used to comment on how small the cow was, now tell him he has already gained money because of how healthy and big the cow has become. She is three months pregnant.

“I don’t know how to express with my words how happy I am, but I want to show it with my action by taking good care of the cow. I am waiting for the moment when I have the first calf and I can share it with other people.”

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Matthew Sawatzky is a photographer in Winnipeg, Man.

Give a gift—Livelihoods

Around the world, MCC’s livelihoods projects are changing families’ lives — expanding income and giving people new ways to work and build a better future.

Send contributions in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).
Phan Thanh Long
An MCC partner talks about his work to reach out to families affected by Agent Orange.

AS TOLD TO LINDA ESPENSHADE

Everyone wants to have a healthy child. I feel pain, I feel sorrow, when I see children with deformities caused by Agent Orange.

I became part of the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA) through a very good friend, Ho Quy Cay. I met him in the military in 1971.

He and his wife had six children; three died soon after birth. One has mental disabilities; the other two are not healthy. Cay died last year from cancer. His wife also is affected by Agent Orange and is weak, but she needs to earn a living to take care of their child who is disabled.

In 2005, when the government had the idea to establish VAVA to help the victims of Agent Orange, Cay and I worked together to set up the Quang Ngai chapter.

He motivated me to do this kind of work. Because of him I have said no to people who asked me to work for other groups who have higher salaries. I want to contribute my strength and my heart to the victims.

I was exposed to Agent Orange when I was a soldier in the North Vietnamese army working in the area around the Mekong River Delta. I was not directly exposed when it dropped, but I drank the water and ate food where it happened. I was in places that had recently been sprayed and walked through a lot of forest and jungle.

I have two children and four grandchildren. They are all healthy and so far do not suffer any effects from Agent Orange, but that’s not the case for many families.

Quang Ngai, a province of 1.5 million people, has about 25,000 families affected by disabilities, most associated with Agent Orange. More than 1,000 of the children affected by Agent Orange have birth defects severe enough they can’t care for themselves. Our main responsibility is to take care of these children.

When I ask people to support VAVA, I tell them we have a responsibility to take care of those affected by Agent Orange.

I understand that I cannot do things to clean up the land and the environment, but I can do work with the people affected by Agent Orange. We can do it.

We make sure we have equality for people affected by Agent Orange whether their parents lived in or fought for the south or the north. We work hard to raise funds and support affected people who are poor, are homeless, have diseases or need surgery.

All human beings have the right to live, to work and to take care of themselves. They have rights to integrate with society. They have a right to go to the doctor for surgery.

If parents send their children to VAVA’s daytime care center, they can work in the field, go to the market, run a business. That will contribute to the income in the family. Therapy for the children with disabilities also is very important.

VAVA is providing families with cows (through the MCC-supported cow bank program). Even though the investment of the cows is very small, it has a lot of meaning. The final results will become very big. It has a lot of labor in it. When a family has a calf, they will transfer it to another family and that family will give to another family.

The most difficult part for parents who have a disabled child is that the pain goes with you for the rest of your life. That was the pain of my friend, Cay, but he is just one of many families.

I get joy from this job too. I remember we had one young man, Le Tuan Kiet, who needs to use a wheelchair. VAVA helped him to buy a photocopier and he opened a copier service, where he hired three employees with disabilities. Between the small profit from the business and from tutoring, he was able to study and earn three university degrees.

Now, although the shop is closed, he earns enough money from tutoring to support his brother, whose disability is so severe he can only lie down. Kiet pays his sister’s tuition and supports his grandparents.

His success is my happiness, and his victory is my success. VAVA only had a very small investment. The success comes from his will and effort.

Phan Thanh Long, who retired from the Vietnamese military in 2001, is president of Quang Ngai Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA). MCC supports VAVA’s daytime care center and a cow bank project in Quang Ngai Province. Many of the VAVA leaders dedicated to reaching out to those affected by Agent Orange are retired military personnel.
Stitching possibilities

Set up in a corner of a shop or home, working by hand or often on a simple treadle machine, participants in MCC programs from Cambodia to South Sudan find that sewing can open new paths to earning a living.

Compiled by Marla Pierson Lester

In Nepal, MCC partner Sakriya Sewa Samaj supports people living with HIV and AIDS with a variety of outreaches, including help with income generation. Nirmala Mukhiya of Argakanchi District was able to take a three-month sewing training and purchase a sewing machine with financial assistance from Sakriya and another organization.

Since graduating from an MCC-supported tailoring program in Juba, South Sudan, in 2013, Anet Konga, right, has established herself as a well-known tailor in her community. Working out of her husband’s motorcycle parts shop, she regularly earns about $117 per month by making dresses and shirts and doing repairs. Ayikoru Florence, left, began the tailoring program years ago, believing that giving under-educated, war-affected women a chance to learn a trade would propel them out of poverty and into sustainable livelihoods. Since beginning a partnership with MCC in 2009, hundreds of women like Konga have graduated from the program. Here, the two women discuss ideas for improving Konga’s business. Konga hopes one day to have her own place to display her work to customers, and she is eager to continue learning new skills through the tailoring program, such as embroidery.

“When I heard about this program, I thought God had answered my prayers.”
— Anet Konga, graduate, MCC-supported tailoring program, Juba, South Sudan
In Bangladesh, Sacred Mark, an enterprise developed by MCC Bangladesh, gives former sex workers a chance to forge a new future. In addition to making soap, women sew items from recycled saris, including this bookmark as well as bags and bed coverings, some of which are sold through Ten Thousand Villages.

“I am very happy for my successes as I have already learned to make skirts, shirts and trousers,” says Sara Jossefa, 16, a tailoring student at the Association of the United Church of Christ Members for Social Development (AMICUMO) vocational school in Muxungu, Mozambique. MCC’s Global Family education program pays for sewing classes in this area, which suffered heavy fighting in Mozambique’s 16-year war, which ended in 1992. After years of disrupted schooling and economic activities, many people are unemployed and can’t afford secondary education for their children, leaving a great need for vocational training.

In Cambodia, 15-year-old Chou Sreyroth uses skills from sewing and tailoring classes at Trapeng Chre Secondary School, one of several secondary schools offering sewing instruction with support from MCC’s Global Family education program. Her family struggled to make ends meet from a yearly rice harvest and work as day laborers in others’ fields. “I wanted to learn and have new skills to help earn an income for my family,” Sreyroth says. Since starting the classes, she used money she earned working in the fields, combined with a loan from neighbors, to buy a sewing machine. Now, through sewing, she earns about $120 a month, money that helps the family and pays for her school supplies. And in an area where many youth migrate to find work in other countries, she has the skills to build a business at home.

“Florida Ninkeje, Lydie Nsengiyumva, Edissa Nahishakiye and Souavis Ndayikeze show dresses they made in a vocational training workshop of MCC partner Christian Union for Peace and Development (UCPD) in Burundi. Here, people rely on tailors to make outfits for special occasions such as weddings, baptisms or Christmas. After graduating in 2013, these young women are working on market days to take orders from customers and to do jobs, such as repairs. But getting established as a tailor takes time. They say they are primarily called on for simple, straightforward sewing such as children’s clothing, skirts and shirts. They hope customers will get to know them and have enough confidence in their skills to hire them for items like gowns made of more expensive material. MCC supports UCPD’s work in training and apprenticeships in sewing, masonry and carpentry. Read more on p. 16 about the difference the carpentry program is making in young people’s lives.”
**Feature story**

**Little by little, growing a business**

In rural Burundi, MCC’s Global Family education program supports apprenticeships, helping youth learn trades such as carpentry.

*BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTO BY MATTHEW LESTER*

Growing up in rural Burundi, Oscar Nijimbere knew war and poverty intimately. As a young man, he knew how to sneak across the border into Tanzania and work in farmers’ fields for a bit of money. At 22, what he didn’t know was how to earn a reliable income. His father farmed, but Nijimbere had to drop out of school at least two times before eighth grade to get odd jobs that helped his parents and five siblings survive. Farming wasn’t enough.

Nijimbere decided he needed to learn a trade. Masonry, welding and mechanics required too much startup money or too much electricity. He had neither, so he decided to find someone who could teach him carpentry. About that time, Nijimbere and a friend met Salvator Bucumi, a carpenter in Bukirasazi, a town in Gitega Province. Bucumi told the young men that he had openings for three people to learn carpentry through a free apprenticeship program run by Christian Union for Peace and Development (UCPD), a partner of MCC’s Global Family education program.

UCPD began this program in 2012 as a way to help vulnerable rural youth earn a living without going to urban areas, where they tend to be exploited as a cheap labor force, says Jean-Pierre Niyonzima, UCPD project coordinator. Since then, 107 students have graduated in carpentry, sewing or masonry from the program in Bukirasazi.

After UCPD determined that Nijimbere, his friend Eric Havjarimana and another friend, Bonventure Bigirimana, qualified for the program, the three friends began training. Three days a week, they walked an hour from their home area of Itaba to Bukirasazi to learn carpentry skills and also to take UCPD classes on conflict prevention, HIV and AIDS prevention, children’s rights and entrepreneurship.

“We went to training with a thirst to know the trade,” says Nijimbere. “I gave all my strength in learning.”

Nijimbere and his friends not only learned the trade. They set up a business together in rural Itaba after graduation in 2014. They rented property where they live together and built an open-air workshop with tree trunks for the frame and saplings for the rafters, which are covered with plastic.

Using the hand tools they were given during the program, they began making doors, windows, chairs, tables and beds for people in Itaba and surrounding areas.

They get orders, Nijimbere says, because they work fast and price their work less than their customers would pay in the closest city, Gitega. They earn enough to pay the rent, restock planks of wood and supply their daily needs.

To bolster their income, they also bought a bit of land where they can raise pigs and the food to feed them. But the business needs more capital. Sometimes, Bigirimana says, they have to refuse customers who want more expensive products because the men don’t have the electricity or tools, which cost thousands of U.S. dollars, needed to make them.

Seeing the dilemma of graduates struggling to establish their businesses, UCPD, with MCC’s support, is offering a year’s extension of the program in 2015–2016—teaching graduates how to legally organize themselves as a business and develop bylaws and strategic plans.

Once the businesses have a viable business plan, UCPD is offering to be a guarantor so business owners can apply for microloans. In addition, MCC is providing new tools for graduates who can show how the tools will benefit their business.

The carpenters—who named their business Umuco, meaning light in the local Kirundi language—were finishing their incorporation process last October.

“Within five years, if we have the capital, we will be well known and established carpenters within Gitega Province,” Nijimbere says.

And even as UCPD extends its work with additional training for these graduates, new youth are training in apprenticeships in Mutaho, another location in Gitega Province. There, in an area far enough away that the region isn’t too saturated with carpenters or other tradespeople, they too are gaining skills to build a new future without leaving home.

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

Name: Hyacinth Stevens

Hometown: Bronx, New York (King of Glory Tabernacle)

Assignment: As New York City program coordinator for MCC East Coast, I build relationships with the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches and its 18 Mennonite congregations in New York City and Connecticut. I also supervise the New York Mennonite Immigration Program, a program of MCC and the council.

Typical day: Starts with prayer for balance, focus and navigation. These three components that begin in prayer are the heart of my day. Balance because, in addition to my MCC role, I’m a wife and mother of four children ages 15, 10, 7 and 5, and a co-pastor with my husband Benjamin. Focus because there is always so much to be done. Listing tasks and priorities helps me track progress—and provides a cushion for the temptation to feel overwhelmed. Our congregations with their demographic, ethnic and cultural diversity are like a microcosm of the world. Navigating this cross-cultural experience calls for active listening, engaging and developing relationships—all central to building and working together.

Joys: Working with our partners in New York is exhilarating. Having the opportunity to see and share faith lived and expressed through giving, serving and working collaboratively is a constant joy and renewal of spirit. (See this story at mcc.org/acommonplace to read more about Stevens’ ministry, including how the MCC U.S. Summer Service program helped prepare her as a leader.)

Challenge: Time and having enough of it! Almost all of our church leaders and pastors are bivocational, which presents a challenge for finding times to meet and plan together. Being flexible is a must. I have met with leaders at 8:30 at night because that was the only time when everyone was available.

Find your place

Interested in serving in the U.S.? Explore openings in our Akron Connections Service Program, a service unit connected to MCC’s offices in Akron and Ephrata, Pa., or learn more about our MCC U.S. Summer Service program, an opportunity for young people of color to serve in their home communities.

To learn more about Akron Connections, call MCC’s Akron office toll free at 888.563.4676. To go mcc.org/summerservice to learn more about the Summer Service program. Go to serve.mcc.org or follow @servemcc on Twitter to find current service opportunities.

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

**“Prayer and keeping Christ at the center of the work and my relationship-building with partners is essential.”**

Hyacinth Stevens, New York City program coordinator for MCC East Coast, heads to a meeting for her work with the New York Mennonite Immigration Program.

My name is Bùi Thị Khánh Huyền.

Age: 9

Lives in: Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam

I live in a house with my mother, father, my baby sister, my grandparents and my cat named Meow-Meow. I ride my bike to fourth grade like my friends do. At home, I play with my baby sister, so my mother can cook. I also do chores, like sweeping the floor, cleaning off the table and helping my grandma wash dishes.

Sometimes I go with my grandma on her motorcycle when she helps families in my community who have disabilities because of Agent Orange (a toxic substance used during the Vietnam War).

For fun, my friends and I play pretend store. We collect long seed pods or fruit that isn’t edible and we buy and sell them. We use leaves for money. I also like to draw, dance and dress up. Someday I would like to design clothing like the beautiful clothes I see in shops.

My favorite food: fried chicken

My favorite subject: English

What I want to be: clothes designer

Help Huyền find her way to school.
After fleeing Mennonite villages in Ukraine and living as refugees, Peter and Susan Niebuhr of Vancouver, B.C., came to Canada with help from MCC in 1948. As they established their family, they dedicated themselves to giving back, including giving to MCC, and eventually planned their giving through bequests. “I wanted to make some of these decisions together with my wife Susan and not necessarily leave everything to the last moment,” Peter Niebuhr says. Continuing to support MCC was part of the plan. “We just feel that MCC has done so much for us and our people, when our people needed it in Europe, and in the meantime has continued to help wherever possible,” he says.

It’s a legacy he hopes will pass generation to generation. “I’m hoping that our young people, as they mature, as they get older, that they also keep MCC in mind and all the good that can take place if we all pull together.”

Myrl Nofziger of Goshen, Ind., learned the importance of giving time and treasure from his father Jesse L. Nofziger and his mother Kathryn. From the Michiana Mennonite Relief Sale to meat canning in Goshen, they were active in MCC activities and adamant about giving financially. “My parents taught us that tithing is expected, and that giving does not start until you are in excess of that amount,” he remembers. Nofziger gives to MCC today and has made plans to give through his estate. His tip? Planned giving is not only about sharing resources but also about passing on beliefs, values and intentions. He has prepared a testament or letter sharing his beliefs with family and explaining the values behind the financial gifts he is making. “A will dispenses things,” he says, “but a testament carries on a legacy.”