Planting peace in a border town | New water, fresh possibilities in Egypt | Bottles for better health in Kenya
Water of life

To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. (Rev. 21:6)

Because of MCC’s work with the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, 10 communities in high levels of poverty have clean water coming into their homes. Bishop Yoanues says that working with the poorest of the poor is more difficult now because of political unrest and economic instability, but that he has great faith that “we are in God’s hands.”

In Nogales, Kenya, MCC’s work with its partners is providing a low-cost method of purifying water and trainings in sanitation and hygiene. The project is changing lives of students and families at two schools run by Kenyan Mennonite congregations and supported through MCC’s Global Family education program.

In Nogales, Mexico, a border town where the push and pull of migration issues can be overwhelming, Marycruz Sandoval recalls how water was a source of conflict as she settled a new area, and violent confrontations seemed like the only answer. MCC’s peacemaking and conflict transformation workshops have given Sandoval and others a chance to see that peace can be a solution to community problems. This was part of a larger transformation for Sandoval, who describes how, through years of contact with MCC’s partner organization in Nogales, her anger at God turned to faith.

As Christians we share God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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MCC news

Find more news at: mccc.org/news

Bangladesh

Reaching recyclers
In Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital, MCC-supported training in health and hygiene awareness is changing the way women such as Rina Akter dig through landfills for recyclable material. “I learned to be careful about how I collect waste. I pay special attention to sharp objects, such as needles,” says Akter, one of about 30 waste recyclers who took part in training conducted by an MCC partner organization, Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee or Committee for the Village Development of Bangladesh. Read more about MCC’s work to prevent HIV and AIDS at aids.mccc.org.

Bolivia

Simple solutions
At an MCC-supported sustainable agriculture training in Totorani, Bolivia, farmers eagerly awaited the planting equipment promised by the workshop leader—and watched in surprise as he pulled out a small sack of cocoa and coffee beans. Each can had seven small perforations and a lid. The leader demonstrated how to spread seed with the can, which allowed farmers to waste fewer seeds and to plant their crops more quickly.

Lebanon

A chance to play
As Syrian refugees flee to Lebanon, many struggle with keeping children busy and relieving the tension that leaving home can create. In south Lebanon, an MCC partner, Development for People and Nature Association, organizes regular activities for about 350 children. (Children’s names are not used for security reasons.) Read more and find updates on MCC’s work in Syria and with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon at mcc.org/middleeastcrisis.

India

Growing more rice
In Bhopal, India, and surrounding villages, farmers such as Meru Handsda are learning new rice-growing techniques through a project of MCC and a partner organization, Asanool Burdwan Seva Kendra (ABSK). “This is the best way of cultivation,” says Handsda, standing among her first crop since she started using the new method. ABSK also trains farmers in worm composting, kitchen gardens and seed preservation.

School kits

These are MCC’s most-requested items. Notebooks and pencils are treasures for families who struggle to afford basic school supplies and bring hope to refugee families.

NEW items only
4 spiral or perforated notebooks (8.5 in x 11 in and 70 sheets)
8 unsharpened pencils
1 ruler (flat, flexible plastic; indicating both 3cm and 12in)
12 colored pencils (in packaging)
1 large pencil eraser

School kits are distributed in useful, double-drawstring cloth bags (11 in x 16 in). You may sew the bag yourself, request bags from a drop-off location or donate contents that we will place in a bag. For bag instructions or drop-off locations, contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2) or go to mccc.org/kits.
Marycruz Sandoval, right, and Manuel Morales Sanchez, an HEPAC staff member, work together to build a fence around a new garden area at HEPAC.

Marycruz Sandoval knows how to fight. From the time she moved to the border town of Nogales, Mexico, two decades ago, she grappled for a better life, settling her family on a vacant plot of land so she could pay school fees instead of rent. Armed with rocks, she and other women confronted the owner of a water tank service, making sure water got delivered to their area out of fear if nothing else. Later, when her teenage daughter had problems with a classmate’s mother, Sandoval talked of buying her a pistol and urged her to fight back with an empty bottle or whatever she might have in her hand.

When MCC began offering peace workshops in Nogales more than a decade ago, Sandoval was not first in line. But she had learned to read and write through the community organization that MCC was partnering alongside. She volunteered in its kitchen, preparing lunch for neighborhood children. “As volunteers here, we had to attend,” she says. “It made me very tired, very sleepy. I took notes and never read them.” She told others how boring it was and called it a waste of time. Yet she kept coming back, and over time the lessons took root.

In a place where life is shaped by the flow of people from elsewhere and runs on the schedules of the maquiladoras or factories that line the border, MCC’s peace work—from workshops more than 10 years ago to trainings this summer—is transforming how Sandoval and others approach the conflicts around them, offering an opportunity to share and heal wounds of the past and opening space to talk about violence. Participants in the MCC-supported workshops study peacebuilding and conflict transformation tech-

Planting peace in a border town

In the border town of Nogales, Mexico, MCC-supported trainings are bringing peace, healing and a new way of looking at the world.

Marycruz Sandoval, right, and Manuel Morales Sanchez, an HEPAC staff member, work together to build a fence around a new garden area at HEPAC.
munities by the drug war, which has killed some 50,000 people in Mexico since 2006. But it is a place where people come and go, where drugs and guns pass through on their way across the border and where the stress of poverty and lure of gangs are strong.

At her 13-year-old son’s teacher conference in January, Fernandez listened as a fellow student talked to the teacher about not needing school because he wants to be a gunman like those for gangs. Last year, from just outside her home, she watched in horror as one man robbed another of his car at gunpoint — her son standing nearby and watching “like it wasn’t anything dangerous.”

This is not a topic people talk about freely, though, for fear of offending the wrong person or getting involved.

“In these workshops is where we can really express what we do think,” Fernandez says.

Pedro Castro Rodriguez, left, and Guadalupe Felix share together during a peace workshop held at HEPAC.

Pedro Castro Rodríguez and Guadalupe Felix talk about the meaning of paz, or peace. Other groups are discussing justice, mercy and truth.

Peace workshops in Nogales are a joint effort of MCC in Mexico and the U.S. West Coast.

Pedro Castro Rodriguez, left, and Guadalupe Felix share together during a peace workshop held at HEPAC.

During a workshop at Sol de Justicia Presbyterian church in Nogales, from left, Ivonne Pazos, her niece Rebeka Castañeda, Dulce Gonzalez Martinez and her mother Eva Martinez talk about the meaning of paz, or peace. Other groups are discussing justice, mercy and truth.

In Nogales, Mexico, as in many other places around the world, people and families are shaped by migration. We invite you to explore the following MCC resources.

*Order “People on the Move: Human Stories of Migration,” a new traveling, 12-panel exhibit featuring stories of migration from around the world. Email exhibits@mcc.org or call MCC U.S. at 717.859.1151 to learn more.

*See the Spring/Summer 2013 Washington Memo on U.S. immigration policy at washingtonmemo.org/newsletter.

*Go to mcc.org/stories/intersections to read the Spring 2013 edition of Intersections, a quarterly publication exploring the theory and practice of MCC work. This issue focuses on migration and development, including Christian emigration from the Middle East, remittances in Nepal, displacement in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mexico as a global crossroads.
The goal, Stucky says, is to open up discussions on peace so that gradually friends and neighbors can continue the conversations. She’s trained HEPAC staff such as Pazos and Tito Bojórquez (read more about him on p. 10), and women such as Sandoval, to lead workshops.

And in their stories Stucky sees clear signs her work is taking root. “It’s a very good way—to live in peace,” says Sandoval, who tracks her journey toward peace to HEPAC’s commitment to her over the years.

It started with learning to read and write. Then, she recalls, leaders began talking to her about God. She told them to stop. “God didn’t maintain me, give me the food,” she told them. “So for me, your God isn’t worth anything.”

But, as she says now, there is nothing that moves without God’s will. She continued working alongside HEPAC, and over time, her anger at God turned to prayer—and eventually faith. As the peace workshops progressed, her outlooks and behaviors began to change too, so gradually at first that her family noticed more than she did.

In time, though, it was Sandoval who, instead of causing discord, would talk to those disagreeing and help find common ground. When young men in her neighborhood fought with rocks, she began speaking to them about living in peace and the respect they should have for themselves and others.

“You see and live life differently,” she says. “Before, the problems, very small, I saw them as very big. Now, we know that in addition to the fact we’re sustained by God, there are ways to solve that problem.”

What’s more difficult is convincing her neighbors that peace can be a solution to problems the community is facing. “The women want to go there and fight as we did in the beginning,” she says. “Now I’m telling them we have a different way of working.”

Sandoval urges them to send officials emails or letters. “I’ve even proposed there are times we can send flowers,” she says.

Not everyone buys this approach. “There are some friends that are not my friends now,” she says. “But there are some that are and have followed us in the workshops.”

After years of relying on rocks and threats to make changes, Sandoval now holds close a different stone—one she chose during a workshop where Stucky trained her and others to teach about peace and that she keeps in her bedroom. “When I’m very angry, when I’m furious, I go and look at that stone and remember my commitment,” she says.

Marla Pierson Lester is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Silas Crews is photographer and multimedia producer for MCC U.S.
came to Nogales, Mexico, in 1993, a year before the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. It was a time of economic crisis, and my parents decided to move here and look for a different life. A lot of people did that. People still do today.

In Nogales at that time, there were not too many people or buildings. It was a tourist town. Crossing the border was so easy. I used to jump the wall, cross to Nogales, Ariz., go to McDonald’s to eat some hamburgers and come back.

Today is totally different. We started to see the people in the U.S. build a wall. Now, there are more border patrol, cameras, helicopters patrolling the wall and remote-controlled planes or drones.

I had the chance to experience the good relationships both Nogaleses had before. But that relationship was broken. It had the effect of dividing countries, dividing relationships. Now there is tension and fear even for those crossing legally.

Most people in this community do not have documents to cross the border. For the most part, they try to make a life here. In the past, more tried to go to the U.S. for a period of time and then they came back. Families that are already here. In the past, more tried to go to the U.S. for a period of time and then they came back. Families that are already established in Nogales, they don’t try now. But migration from farther south in Mexico and from Central America is continuing. I think that never changed.

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Afaf Melmy Ibrahim could pump water from the ground at her house in Akhrasha, Egypt—but she didn’t want to use it. The water was yellow, salty, contaminated with sewage. She had experienced the kidney pain that plagues some Egyptians who regularly drink impure water.

To get clean drinking water for her family and water to use for cleaning and laundry, she had two choices: ask a neighbor to give her water or buy it. Both were problematic. Money is scarce in Akhrasha, where people work day to day to get food. Ibrahim’s husband, Montaser Hana Zakher, works as a carpenter when he has work. One of their two sons, Thomas, 5, is developmentally delayed, making it difficult for his mother to leave him while walking four kilometers to buy water. Borrowing from neighbors who had cleaner tap water was a problem too, Ibrahim says, because they sometimes became annoyed and critical. “Why did you come three times today?” they would ask her. “Are you cooking a duck? Do you have visitors? Who are they and why do they come to you?” The implied judgment, she says, was that if she had enough money to buy meat, she shouldn’t be asking for free water.

Now, Ibrahim’s family and about 100 other families in Akhrasha have clean water coming into their homes because of a comprehensive development project coordinated by MCC’s partner BLESS, Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services. BLESS is a service arm of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.

“Even the tea and the food tastes better and smells better because of the clean water,” Ibrahim says. “It changes the taste of life.”

The project is working in 30 communities throughout Egypt that have high levels of poverty and little governmental or nongovernmental support. It focuses on areas where more than half of the residents are Christian, a minority and often-marginalized population in Egypt, but serves both Muslim and Christian families.

In each community, BLESS works for five years to train a team of people to address needs related to health, education, children and youth and livelihoods. At the end of the five-year period, teams carry on work in the community without assistance.

Since 2008, MCC has supported the project’s efforts to provide clean water, which not only decreases illness, but also improves relationships among neighbors, saves money, supports livelihoods and raises people’s dignity. MCC also helps fund trainings in health and sanitation in the communities.
In Akhrasha, getting permission from the government for the water project and then digging ditches for the water pipes helped to strengthen relationships between Christians and Muslims. Neighbors who previously coexisted with little interaction came together to help each other get water into houses on their street.

For Ibrahim’s neighbor, Aida Fared Gad, having water in her own home gave her dignity and improved her relationship with the Muslim friend she used to ask for water. “Now we can deal with other issues without the frustration of water,” she says.

Clean water also has helped Gad’s husband, Naser Hermina, develop a side business of making white gypsum wall decorations, like a sun plaque or crown molding. When he mixes the plaster powder with clean water in a mold, the surface of the decorations is smooth. Dirty water causes divots that mar the decorations.

Hermina can sell five to 15 of these decorations a month, at $1.60 to $2.45 each, supplementing his intermittent work of covering indoor walls with black gypsum. The family also saves money each month, reducing the $20 they used to spend to buy water to a $2.40 connection fee paid to the village.

In El-Rashah, a village where almost everyone earns money by collecting and recycling Cairo’s garbage, 180 of the poorest families now have clean water.

Samiha Saleh, who learned about health from BLESS, is now a member of the BLESS team in El-Rashah. She’s a messenger of the gospel of clean water, in part because her husband’s chronic kidney stones cleared up when her family got clean water through a previous project.

In Egypt, contaminated water has a significant debilitating impact on kidney health, says Bishop Youannes, a former surgeon who now coordinates BLESS. Water contaminated with sewage as well as industrial and agricultural toxins also causes a wide variety of gastrointestinal diseases and can play a role in maternal and infant mortality, he says.

Before people in El-Rashah had clean water, they would preserve the water they had by only washing dishes every three days and stretching out the days between laundry. The unclean water would cause their faces to break out, so they didn’t want to bathe regularly, Saleh says.

Now Saleh goes door to door and street to street, sharing what she learned about sanitation and healthy living with women and their daughters. She tells them to use clean water to wash floors and dishes so that insects, especially houseflies, don’t congregate and spread disease. She encourages them to wear gloves while sorting garbage, usually a woman’s job, and to wash vegetables in clean water to avoid hepatitis A.

Carrying out BLESS’ work for the poorest of the poor has become more difficult for the organization in the past two years because of the political unrest and economic instability following the revolution that overthrew Egypt’s president in 2011, says Bishop Youannes.

Workers are more cautious about going to trainings or monitoring their work because they fear for their personal safety, especially in certain areas where Christians have been targeted. As inflation rises and uncertainty prevails, Bishop Youannes continues to commit BLESS’ work to God.

“The situation is very, very, very difficult,” he says, “but we are so full of faith that the God who was with our fathers will be with us. I have great faith that we are in God’s hands.”

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

Giving a gift—Water
Help MCC bring clean water to families around the world.

$235 is the cost of connecting a home to a clean water supply in Egypt.

$40 helps train people to maintain wells and cisterns in places such as Cambodia and Bolivia.

Send contributions in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).
Bottles for better health in Kenya

Through an MCC-supported project at two Mennonite schools in Nairobi, Kenya, a simple, low-cost method of disinfecting water is improving health and raising attendance.

BY MARLA PIERSON LESTER

n the urban compound of Menno Kids Academy, in an impoverished area of Nairobi, Kenya, tables of clear, plastic bottles fill the courtyard—a simple but powerful tool in a fight for better health.

Through the day, the sun’s UV rays soak into the bottles of water, killing bacteria, viruses and parasites such as giardia and protozoa. “I could not believe that water can be treated in such a simple way,” par ent Morris Ndallla remembers thinking when he first learned of the project.

Ndallla, a father of seven, had long known the water coming from his tap was contaminated and unfit to drink. Yet he could not afford to buy water or the fuel needed to boil enough water for his large family. “We always suffered from diarrhea, children complained of stomach pains and their skin was always having ringworms,” Ndallla remembers. Whatever money he could save seemed to go for treatment at the local health center.

Today, Ndallla’s family is rarely ill—a change he attributes to SODIS, plus training in hand-washing, hygiene and sanitation.

Each year, MCC’s Global Family education program provides funding for teacher stipends, educational supplies, nutritious food and other needed items for Menno Kids Academy and Mukuru Menno Academy, schools run by Kenyan Mennonite congregations. And it was because of this relationship that MCC and a partner organization, The Water School, began water, sanitation and hygiene projects with the students’ families. The project’s lessons in hygiene, sanitation and health also are making a difference.

When the Menno Kids Academy effort began in 2010, students reported eating washed hands primarily before meals—but not necessarily after going to the bathroom or changing a baby’s diaper.

In Mathare North—where contaminated water, inadequate sewage and toilet facilities and improper disposal of waste, including human waste, pose numerous challenges to health—any lapse in hand-washing can trigger diarrhea and illness.

Through this effort, children—who may not normally take the time for proper hand-washing—learn over and over of its importance and begin to push each other to wash well at school.

The project also provides trainings for parents in SODIS, hygiene and sanitation.

If the costs of not keeping clean are high, so sometimes are the complications of putting good ideas into practice.

Keeping your family’s latrines clean sounds like a straightforward task—except that in the Mathare North compound where Lillian Achieng lives, 24 families share two latrines, and any progress requires cooperation among neighbors. “This is a challenge, especially when some households do not care for sanitation,” Achieng says.

Yet the training prompted Achieng to call a meeting with neighbors. They committed to creating a rotation for cleaning the toilets, a step of shared planning they had not taken before, and to being more conscious about disposing of trash in shared areas.

“This has truly helped in keeping our environment clean and ensuring that our children play in a clean compound,” Achieng says. “It’s a change that means more than safe fun. Achieng, Ndallla and other parents report that since the project began, their children are spending more time in school and less at the health center. Parents, saving money on health care, become more motivated to continue the new methods. And, Ndallla found, as children’s health and school attendance improved, grades often go up as well, so much so that now he has a new worry—how to pay fees for secondary school.”

Marla Pierson Lester is managing editor of A Common Place magazine.
Area directors

Name: Dan Jantzi and Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi

Hometown: Lowville, N.Y. (Lowville Mennonite Church)

Assignment: As area directors for MCC’s programs in Southeast Asia, we work with MCC representatives and programs in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam. We help interpret and communicate the complex realities of MCC programs and partners in Southeast Asia for MCC staff in Canada and the U.S., and help those in Southeast Asia better understand MCC.

Serving with MCC: Since 1989 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Indonesia. (Go to acommonplace.mcc.org to read more about the couple’s experiences working with MCC, raising children abroad and finding faith and hope in societies struck by upheaval.)

Typical day: On office days, we spend hours communicating with people in other parts of the world via email and Skype. On our frequent travels, we meet with MCC personnel and partners across Southeast Asia. We’ve lived in Indonesia for the past 12 years and stayed there until our youngest son finished high school this May. Now we’re relocating to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where we will work in the MCC Asia regional office.

Joys: Sitting on the floor in a bamboo stilt house in the pouring rain and hearing neighbor women eagerly interrupting each other to tell the stories of how they have worked for change in their community. We also enjoy working with MCC representatives to imagine and plan effective programs.

Challenge: Dealing with time differences of up to 12 hours between our office and MCC offices in other parts of the world. Also, beginning this year, all three of our children will be on the other side of the world—in Idaho and Virginia. Now we know how our parents must have felt!

Find your place

MCC needs leaders experienced in international development and cross-cultural service.

Go to serve.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office to learn about current service opportunities.

We encourage MCC alumni to explore available leadership positions.

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

Learning about peace

In Nogales, Mexico, MCC helps teach peacebuilding to adults and children. One big lesson is that peace can mean trying and trying to find new ways to solve a conflict. Sometimes, it’s kind of like walking through a maze.

My name is Abdiel Parra Valenzuela.

Age: 13

Lives in: Nogales, Mexico

I live with my mom, dad, two younger brothers, one younger sister, an aunt and all my pets. I have five dogs, one cat and two rabbits. I like animals a lot.

I get up at 6 in the morning to have breakfast, get ready and go to school. When I get there, I play soccer and basketball with my friends. Then classes start at 7 and last until 1:30 in the afternoon. We study Spanish, math, English, science and geography. In geography, we look at maps, and they teach us about countries that we haven’t seen.

After school, I have lunch and do my homework. Some afternoons, I volunteer in a veterinary clinic. When we took one of our dogs to the clinic, I liked how they were helping the animals. I clean the cages and give water and food to the animals. I’ve learned how to give medicines too. My favorite part is caring for the hamsters. They’re pretty.

My favorite food: beans with flour tortillas

My favorite subject: geography

What I want to be: veterinarian

My favorite place: Mexico

How do you greet someone in Spanish?

hola (Say OH-ihah)

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hola (Say OH-ihah)
Zwiebach is a family tradition for Bobby Martin. But the 23-year-old from Reedley, Calif., began making it on a large scale at the West Coast Mennonite Relief Sale and Auction two years ago. The sale, held each April, becomes a gathering point for his church, Reedley Mennonite Brethren, and for alumni of Fresno Pacific University, where Martin went to school and now works. “It’s a great time to gather as believers and to just kind of catch up, but also know things are going for a good cause,” he says.

reliefsales.mcc.org

Four decades ago, Sara Stoesz helped start this Altona, Man., MCC thrift shop to make use of donated clothing and raise money for MCC. It was the beginning of a network that now includes 113 shops in Canada and the U.S. and has raised some $167 million for the work of MCC. Today, Stoesz, now 81, and her husband Ed Stoesz still volunteer together at the shop several days a week. “I have made a lot of friends here I didn’t know before,” she says. “It’s very enriching . . . it is fulfilling because it’s helping others—at home and overseas.”

thrift.mcc.org