

# Provoking One Another to Love and Good Deeds

## 2015 MCC Central States Executive Director's Annual Report

The title is the 2016 invitation from J. Ron Byler, MCC U.S. Executive Director and Don Peters, MCC Canada Executive Director, to reflect on Hebrews 10:23-24:

*23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,*

How do we begin and continue to spark love and good deeds as we carry out the mission of MCC Central States? Because we are committed to relief, development and peace in the name of Christ, our unwavering hope is that our eyes continue to be opened to the ways that Christ calls us to love and do good deeds.

### Introduction

The MCC Central States region covers 16 states. The region runs from North Dakota to Texas and from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River, including the state of Mississippi. Approximately 450 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations are in the region.

### Programs and Support Services

In 2015, we saw the unwavering hope in the work of our **Young Adult Program** Coordinator, Sharon Nelson. She continues to work passionately at actualizing these MCC strategic goals:

- Strengthen support and coordination for the Summer Service Program
- Increase opportunities for young adults to serve through internships and new access points
- Address the barriers that make it difficult for young adults to serve

To this end, Sharon has been and is actively recruiting for our young adult programs - Summer Service, SALT and IVEP. She is also the chairperson for an MCC workgroup that is exploring ways that MCC can provide internship opportunities for young people.

MCC CS New Orleans program staff, Pam Nath, continues to find hope- in spite of the ongoing and systemic racism that plagues New Orleans- in her work there. Two of MCC Central States' strategies that encompass Pam's work are, "focusing education and advocacy efforts on the racial disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system," and "exploring and expanding new resources for dismantling oppression within staff and board." Some of her work has included, working to address racial disparities in the criminal justice system, organizing white people for racial justice, and supporting New Orleans partner organizations.

Erica Littlewolf, program coordinator for the **Indigenous Visioning Circle**, and Karin Kaufman Wall, **Peace and Justice Education** Coordinator collaborate to educate about the Doctrine of Discovery. The Loss of Turtle Island is a participatory learning experience that depicts the historic relationship between European settlers and Indigenous nations, is gaining interest across the U.S. Participants continue to share that they learn history that they never learned in school and express a new openness to learning more about their own connection to the history and present-day realities. This past year, the MCC US Board was hosted for meetings on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church. The response has been deeply affirming.

How to respond to **Immigration and Education** continues to be a challenge. In order for us to really imagine how we can respond robustly and with unwavering hope, we have closed our MCC office in Houston, Texas. This next year, we hope to establish the program in the South Texas. We will continue to develop connections with new nonprofits that are working on legal matters with unaccompanied minors. We hope to develop curriculum and workshops to be shared

primarily in Latino/a church settings on topics that have been identified previously in discernment to better resource our Latino/a constituency.

After decades of maintaining an MCC office in Freeman, SD, it was decided to close the **Northern Tier** office. Many hours of prayer and discernment preceded the decision, and finally it was determined that the work could/should be reimagined. Our Donor Relations Director, Maynard Knepp, and the rest of the staff are exploring the many opportunities we have in the northern part of our region to build and maintain relationships and MCC events.

This past year, the MCC Central States **Donor Relations** Team worked intentionally on forming a strategic plan that focused on top donor cultivation. It is our continued goal to improve relationships with those who give to MCC. Moreover, we are working closely with the U.S. Thrift Shop Development Coordinator to encourage Central States **Thrift Shops** to use best business practices.

In 2015, the MCC CS **Material Resource Center** in North Newton, Kan. processed over 600,000 pounds of clothes, shoes, belts and purses, generating over \$100,000 for MCC Central States. We are blessed by the many volunteers who work at the Material Resource Center, the 11 Thrift shops, coordinate the 10 Relief Sales and provide labor at the 13 Meat Canning locations. The total number of volunteer hours served in 2015 in the MCC CS Material Resource Center was 6,169. There were many thousands of kits, comforters and blankets donated, checked and packed for distribution around the world. MCC CS sent two shipping containers directly out of the Central States' warehouse in 2015. In early Feb. of 2016, we shipped approximately 72,000 pounds of meat to Ethiopia.

Looking ahead, to address our strategic goal of focusing education and advocacy efforts on the racial disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system, we are starting 2 new kits: Prisoner Care and Returning Citizens.

Continue to pray for MCC Central States as we continue to open ourselves to love and good deeds.

Grace & Peace,

Michelle E. Armster

Submitted by Michelle E. Armster, MCC Central States Transitional Executive Director, February 2015